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# JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

Books by RAYMOND CALKINS

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

THE ELOQUENCE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

# JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

## A STUDY IN PERSONAL RELIGION

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BY
RAYMOND CALKINS

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*"I believe in the Holy Ghost . . . Who spake by the Prophets."*

*"The goodly fellowship of the Prophets: praise Thee."*

# PREFACE

THERE is need of a convenient book for the study of Jeremiah. Many books have been written of late years on this, in many respects, the greatest of the prophets. A list of these will be found in the Bibliography. No one of them, however, follows the method of the present publication, which attempts a chronological rearrangement of the entire material, a brief commentary on the text, and an interpretation of the spiritual experience of the prophet throughout his career.

It is little short of a tragedy that this extraordinary record of the deepest experience of God to be found in the Old Testament should not be more familiar to the Bible reader. Yet in their present form it is not too much to say that, without a guide, the prophecies of Jeremiah are unintelligible. Even the earnest and thoughtful student soon gets lost and is unable to find his way. In his *The Modern Use of the Bible,* Dr. Fosdick says:

> As a lad I started to read the Scripture through according to the familiar schedule, three chapters each weekday and five on Sunday, by which we were assured that in a single year we could complete the reading of the Book. I got safely through Numbers and Leviticus, even Proverbs did not altogether quench my ardor, but I stuck in the middle of Jeremiah and never got out. I

> do not blame myself, for how can a boy read Jeremiah in its present form and understand it?[1]

Neither, for that matter, can anyone else. This book has for its sole aim to make a straight path through these tangled chapters; to trace the development of the prophet's character and message from the beginning of his life to its end, and to show that "a braver, gentler and more exquisite or more courageous soul has not often walked the earth; his spiritual pioneering in the realm of personal religion made him a forerunner of Jesus and one of the eminent benefactors of the race."

No effort is made to suggest, much less to discuss, many of the critical questions with which the Book of Jeremiah fairly bristles. Certain references will aid the student who desires to examine these in detail. Constant use has been made in the preparation of this book of three outstanding studies of Jeremiah. Dr. A. S. Peake's *Commentary*[2] has admirable introductory material, and careful and copious notes explain the text with scholarly precision and detail. Dr. John Skinner's *Prophecy and Religion*[3] is indispensable to any serious study of Jeremiah. It traverses the different stages of the prophet's career and contains authoritative studies of the different elements in his teaching. Dr. George Adam Smith's volume, *Jeremiah,*[4] gives a fresh translation of many portions of the Book, and illuminating chapters interpret various elements of Jeremiah's personality and message.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Cambridge University Press, and to Doubleday, Doran and Company for permission to use the translation of certain passages by Dr. Skinner and Professor Smith.

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[1] P. 21.

[2] *New Century Bible Series,* 2 Vols., New York, Henry Frowde, 1910.

[3] Cambridge University Press, 1922.

[4] New York, George H. Doran Company, 1922.

The Revised Version has been used throughout and this text should be followed by the reader.

Cambridge, Massachusetts, June, 1929.

# INTRODUCTION

JEREMIAH stands in the front rank of the Old Testament prophets.

His prophecy covers a long period of Hebrew history. He was born about 650 B. C. His call to be a prophet came in 626 B. C., when he was but twenty-four years of age. His work did not end until after Jerusalem was finally destroyed and the people went into exile in 586 B. C. Here is a period of over sixty years covered by his life, and a period of nearly forty years of continuous work as a prophet. Only Isaiah in the whole range of Old Testament prophecy had so long a career as this.

The period covered by his prophecy is the most important and tragic in the whole history of Israel. It is as if, having followed for centuries the swift flowing stream of its national life, we came at last to the cataract. We may well call this whole period "The Decline and Fall of the Hebrew Nation." As an independent nation, the Hebrew people ceased to exist after 586 B. C., except for the briefest intervals during the Maccabean period. Jeremiah accompanied his people through all of these catastrophic years. He is linked imperishably with this culminating tragedy. Precisely as the period of the Revolution has made the name of Washington great, and the period of the Civil War has made immortal the name of Lincoln, just so the great period through which Jeremiah lived has made him one of the greatest of the prophets. Great periods produce great men.

Because of his personality he towers above other Old Testament characters. We know more about the man Jeremiah than about any other prophet in the whole range of Old Testament literature. Of some of these prophets, like Haggai, or Micah, or Zephaniah, or Obadiah, we know nothing. About others, like Amos and Hosea, we know something. Concerning Isaiah and Ezekiel we have much information. But Jeremiah we know from the beginning of his life to the end of it. We can follow step by step his public career from first to last. More than this, we can trace with accuracy and even with considerable detail his spiritual pilgrimage, the development of his inward experience. All of this is spread out before us. He had a biographer. As Johnson had his Boswell, Jeremiah had his Baruch. And Boswell was no prouder of his subject than Baruch was of his. Neither was he any more faithful to it. Here, in what we call the book of Jeremiah, are set down the events, the fortunes, the thoughts, the reflections, the prayers of the man from youth to old age. And the personality of Jeremiah stands revealed. The more we know of him, the deeper our admiration, our reverence for him becomes. He is seen for what he is: one of the great, outstanding personalities of the Bible, a God-controlled, a God-inspired man.

Jeremiah is great because of the greatness of his message. One prophet differs in glory from another. All have great truths to declare. The stature of each prophet is measured by that degree of God's truth that he could master and utter. Judged by this standard, Jeremiah mounts to the peaks. He gathered up the best that already had been said, and he raised that truth to a point beyond which it hardly passed, until we turn the page from the Old Testament to the New.

He more nearly approximated, anticipated the Gospel of Christ than any other teacher in the old dispensation. "The finest in Old Testament prophecy was recast in the furnace of his spirit," and came out as pure gold.

Yet, in spite of the importance of Jeremiah the prophet, the book containing the story of his life and the record of his teaching is one of the least read and the least understood of all of the books of the Old Testament.

In part this is due to popular prejudice. Jeremiah has so long been known as "the weeping prophet" that many people never think of him in any other way. It is always difficult to account for the origin of such ideas as this. The fact that Jeremiah's name has been associated with the book of Lamentations may explain this notion. Also, it is true that his writings contain many records of personal grief. "There are many poignant expressions of protracted inward agony"[1] in the book of Jeremiah, and these really give us the key to his personality and to his religious significance. To infer from this, however, that he spent his time in shedding tears is grossly to misunderstand his character.[2] The greatest sensitiveness to pain is often the spring of the highest moral courage. It is said of Jesus that He wept, and it was because He wept over Jerusalem that He was willing to be crucified for it. No one wept over the sins and sorrows of the people more than General William Booth. But his tears were the source of his undying enthusiasm, of his gallant and crusading spirit which challenged the strongholds of vice and was unafraid of the face of evil. The reason why many people lack the quality of a fearless heroism, is that they are never inwardly moved by the daily spectacle of sin and sorrow. It is precisely because Jeremiah, more than any other character known to us except Jesus of Nazareth, was profoundly moved by the tragedy of existence as he saw it, that he rose to the very heights of moral heroism. The "mild aversion with which he is regarded by sane, energetic Christians" is just another proof of the dense ignorance of him which still prevails. To make him the proper subject for cheap comment is to advertise not only ignorance but sheer irreverence. There is no nobler, more militant or morally more splendid character to be found in the whole range of Scripture. Moses and Paul of Tarsus are the only men who can stand beside him. He is a gentle, refined and sensitive soul, but with capacities of godlike courage. It is one of the objects of this book to rescue Jeremiah from popular misconception and to present him as a character worthy of our deepest admiration and reverence.

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[1] Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion,* p. 34.

[2] George Adam Smith has suggested that it would be nearer the truth to call him the "screaming" prophet. *Jeremiah,* p. 318.

Another reason why Jeremiah is so little read and understood is because the book which bears his name is, in its present form, one of the most unreadable books in the Bible. No clear principle seems to have determined its arrangement. As a result, one who takes the book up and starts to read it through, finds himself in a state of constant bewilderment. The book, it is true, begins at the beginning with an account of the prophet's call and of his early prophecies. But thereafter successive chapters carry us hither and thither over all the long course of Jeremiah's active life. Without warning the scene shifts. We do not know where to find ourselves. The prophecies seem to have been set down helter-skelter with no thought of chronological arrangment. The book of Jeremiah as it stands is a "conglomeration of prophecies," as no less a scholar than George Adam Smith has well called it. In the same chapter may be found sections which belong to widely different periods in Jeremiah's ministry. Thus the reader finds himself baffled as he attempts to follow the course of events. As if this were not enough, a good deal of the material in the book is called by Jeremiah's name, although written by someone else. Books were then treated with a freedom which to-day would be condemned. Now the book of Jeremiah passed through many vicissitudes before coming to its present form.[3] A good many scribes worked the material over after it came into their hands. They inserted material without taking the trouble to point out that Jeremiah had nothing to do with it. We are left to discover this for ourselves. Evidently there is plenty of opportunity for literary guessing in a composition of this kind. No wonder that so many people who really take their Bibles seriously and want to understand them, have been discouraged and repelled.

It is another object of this study of Jeremiah to straighten out all of this material, without attempting to go into the intricacies of the subject, and to make a clear path through it from beginning to end. And if one will intelligently follow the tragic story of the adventures and spiritual experiences of this gallant soul, the book of Jeremiah will always have for him a supreme and lasting interest.

Another difficulty, however, remains to be overcome. Even if the book of Jeremiah were the most orderly and readable book in the Bible, and it is actually the reverse of all that, our understanding and appreciation of it would depend upon our knowledge of contemporary political events. The whole story of Jeremiah's career, outward and inward, is based on external history. And unless this external history is known, the book cannot be known. One simply cannot understand what the author is talking about. The messages of Woodrow Wilson would be dreary and unintelligible reading for one who knew little or nothing about the events which preceded or followed the World War. That is why so many Bible readers find the writings of Jeremiah dull and uninteresting. They have only the vaguest ideas about Josiah, know nothing about Jehoiakim, and are ignorant of the events which led to the final capture and destruction of Jerusalem. So, for them, Jeremiah is a closed book. It is another purpose of this book to sketch the historical background against which the splendid spiritual drama of Jeremiah's life was enacted.

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[3] See chapter III.

For if these difficulties can be overcome, there is unfolded before the eyes of the Bible student an unparalleled record of spiritual achievement. One stands in the presence of a godlike human soul.

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# JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

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## CHAPTER I

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JEREMIAH'S CAREER

THE year 722 B. C. was a fateful one in the history of the Hebrew people. Then the Northern Kingdom was overthrown by the Assyrians and the Ten Tribes which composed it were carried away into captivity and into oblivion. Jeroboam II had died about 740 B. C., the year in which Amos had predicted the downfall of his kingdom, and in less than two decades it had ceased to exist. From the first the Northern Kingdom had been threatened by the Syrians, their immediate neighbors on the north, and by the Assyrians who lay behind, with Nineveh for their capital. To protect themselves, the Kings of Israel played politics with these two nations, making alliances first with the one, and then with the other, in the effort to maintain their independence. During the dynasty of Omri, the Northern Kingdom had attained some degree of power and prosperity which reached its height under King Jeroboam II. But this prosperity was only temporary, due to the cessation of the attacks by the Syrians who were hard pressed by their Assyrian enemies. In spite of their precarious situation, the people appeared, according to Amos and Hosea, to have lived in luxury, frivolity, and irreligion. The successors of

Jeroboam II were weak kings. One after another, they were murdered. It is perhaps in allusion to these swift and tragic vicissitudes that Hosea says (10:7), "As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water." Assyria now became active. The Northern Kingdom entered into an alliance with the Syrians, and the Assyrians marched against the coalition under their great leader Tiglath-pileser III. Damascus, the capital of the Syrians, was captured, and the Northern Hebrew Kingdom became a vassal nation and was ruled by a Governor, Hoshea, appointed by the Assyrians. All of this happened in the year 732 B. C.

Ten years later, Hoshea was induced by the Egyptians to revolt against the Assyrians in spite of the warnings of the prophets. Assyria promptly marched against Samaria, captured it in 722, destroyed it utterly and carried the people away in exile.

It is not true to say that the ten tribes were "lost." It is true, however, to say that those who survived or remained in the land lost their distinctive national traits, and sank to the level of the peoples around them. Thus it came to pass that in later centuries a Jew hated his degenerate and degraded Samaritan half-brother more than he hated the Greeks or the Romans. The Northern Kingdom had ceased to exist. From now on, the future of the Hebrew nation lay with the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, which composed the Southern Kingdom, with Jerusalem for its capital.

The Northern Kingdom had lasted for just about two centuries. Those two centuries contain much of interest in Hebrew history and literature. There Elijah had done his work and had borne his immortal witness. There Amos, himself a Southerner, had prophesied at Bethel and had struck the first note of the great chorus of prophetic inspiration which was to echo down the centuries. There Hosea had sought, out of his own tragic experience, to teach the people the terrible effects of sin and the redemptive love of God. Still, it may with fairness be said that the chief function of the Northern Kingdom was to serve as a buffer state protecting for these two centuries the Southern Kingdom from disaster, and thus enabling it to fulfill its religious destiny and to perform its marvelous mission for mankind.

We turn now to the Southern Kingdom of which Jerusalem was the center. During all these crashing events in the North, Isaiah, the prophetic statesman, had been at the helm. Without holding any official position, Isaiah was engaged for forty years in directing and controlling the policy of his country. And it was largely due to his efforts that the existence of the Southern Kingdom was prolonged for another century and a half. Both Isaiah and his contemporary Micah predicted the impending doom of Samaria. Nothing, they felt, could save it from destruction.

While the Northern Kingdom was tottering to its fall, Ahaz was on the throne in the South. He was weak, irresolute, unprincipled. His policy was one of subservience to Assyria, a course which Isaiah resolutely opposed. Judah became a vassal state, and the independence of Jerusalem was practically forfeited. As a consequence, the people were compelled to pay a heavy yearly tribute to the Assyrians, and the resulting poverty and sufferings of the people are described in the books of Isaiah and Micah. In addition, however, to material destitution, the people of the South suffered also from a decay of religion. They adopted the religious ideas and practices of their pagan overlords.

They even resorted to human sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3) and introduced all kinds of religious novelties. The whole life of the Southern Kingdom was degraded by the national policy.

The course of Ahaz was typical of the shortsighted and disastrous policy of the rulers of Jerusalem who sought by all kinds of secular alliances with neighboring states to preserve the national equilibrium. Quite different was the attitude of the prophets who preached reliance upon Jehovah and the maintenance of national and religious integrity.

Ahaz was succeeded by Hezekiah, who tried to purify the religious life of the people, and to centralize worship at Jerusalem. Hand in hand, and in entire sympathy, Isaiah and Hezekiah worked together for the salvation of the Southern Kingdom. Jerusalem was fortified, an improved water supply was developed, and the military establishment was gradually increased. During Hezekiah's reign, Samaria fell, and there was now no intervening state between Jerusalem and the Assyrians.

Hezekiah was soon importuned first by Babylonia, the rising power behind Nineveh, and then by Egypt on the South, to throw off the yoke of Assyria, and to declare the independence of the Southern Kingdom. The patriotic party in Jerusalem favored this policy and Hezekiah received with honors the ambassador from Babylonia, out of deference to the patriotic feeling of the people. Isaiah, however, protested, warning the king that one day all of his wealth and all of his descendants would be the prey of the Babylonians. The prophet succeeded, for a time, in defeating the plan for an alliance with the Babylonians by appearing in public in the garb of a captive (Isaiah 20), thus dramatically depicting the results of a revolt from

Assyria. Jeremiah, as we shall see later on, often used the same method of enforcing his teachings. Without doubt, he was influenced by the example of his great predecessor.

The people, however, were not satisfied with this decision. They continued to clamor for a revolt from Assyria, and at last Hezekiah yielded. Then Sennacherib, who had succeeded Sargon as king of the Assyrians, marched against Jerusalem and besieged it (701 B. C.). The episode which followed is one of the most dramatic in the history of the Hebrew people. The story is told in full in 2 Kings 19, and Isaiah 37, and it has been immortalized in Byron's well-known poem, "The Destruction of Sennacherib." At this crisis, Isaiah rose to the heights of prophetic inspiration. He preached that Zion was inviolable, and that, in spite of all odds, Jerusalem never would be taken. No one knows exactly what caused the sudden lifting of the siege by the Assyrians. Various explanations have been offered. The most probable one is that the Assyrian army was overtaken by pestilence—Herodotus says field mice—or possibly by some sudden panic. At any rate the danger was, for the moment, removed. The Assyrians departed as suddenly as they came.

Hezekiah therefore returned to his policy of vassalage to the Assyrians who marched south and conquered Egypt. Isaiah's work was done. The thirty-third chapter of the book which bears his name, that "most beautiful of all his discourses marks the peaceful and triumphant close of his ministry which finds an echo in the 46th, perhaps also in the 48th, 75th and 76th psalms." [1] How different the close of the life and ministry of Jeremiah were, we shall see later on.

Manasseh followed Hezekiah on the throne at Jerusalem, and he had a long reign of nearly sixty years. The whole period was marked by a violent reaction against the teaching of Isaiah and his adherents. This was doubtless caused by Hezekiah's attempt to suppress the rural sanctuaries and to make the Temple at Jerusalem the one center of the national worship. Without doubt also, the people were disappointed because of their continued vassalage to Assyria. Accordingly the old idolatries reappeared. Manasseh introduced the worship of Assyrian deities and made his own son to pass through the fire (2 Kings 21:6), and the prophets of the pure worship of Jehovah suffered fierce persecutions. It was a dark and gloomy period, unrelieved by any ray of light. Yet the truths preached by the prophets must have been silently cherished in the hearts of the faithful who patiently waited for the dawn of a better day. It was in the late years of Manasseh's reign that Jeremiah was born (cir. 650 B. C.), who was destined to light once more the fires on the altar of God and to guide the people through the turbulent events which marked the close of their national history.

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[1] **Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible,* art., "Hezekiah."**

At last Manasseh died and he was succeeded by Josiah, one of the noblest kings in the long history of the Hebrew people. He came to the throne in the year 639 B. C., when he was only eight years of age. He and Jeremiah were contemporaries and they were destined to work together as Hezekiah and Isaiah had done seventy years earlier. For a time, conditions remained unchanged. But when Josiah was eighteen years of age, he felt strong enough to inaugurate drastic reforms as laid down by the prophetic party. At this time, the social and religious life of the people were at their worst. Faith in Jehovah was practically dead. One has only to read the chapters of Zephaniah, and the earlier prophecies of Jeremiah to see how terrible conditions were. Thefts, murders, adulteries, all kinds of social injustice, perjury and extortion were openly practiced. And the root of all this evil lay in the great national apostasy. As Jeremiah said, speaking for Jehovah at the opening of his ministry (Jeremiah 2:13), "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." At this time, Assyria's hold on the Southern Kingdom was relaxing, for she was now engaged in a death grapple with the Babylonians who were steadily growing in power. Assyria had also to withstand a terrible invasion of the dreaded Scythians who suddenly emerged from the region of the Caucasus, swarmed into Western Asia and overran it. They almost shattered the remaining power of Assyria. Then they poured into Palestine and shook the land into consternation. They seem, however, to have left the Southern Kingdom undisturbed. Some of the earliest of the prophecies of Jeremiah, as we shall see, are devoted to this dramatic invasion of the Scythians which he interprets as a scourge of God for the sins of the people.

Josiah made good use of the sobered and chastened mood of the people in order to inaugurate his reforms. The story of how this was accomplished is one of the most curious and interesting to be found in the Old Testament (2 Kings 22). In the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah resolved to make some necessary repairs on the Temple building. So he sent to Hilkiah the high priest and told him to see how much money there was in the Temple treasury and to use it to employ the workmen who should make these repairs. When the work was begun, Hilkiah reported that a Book of Laws had been found in the Temple, and he sent it to Josiah. And when Josiah "had heard the words of the Book of the Law, he rent his clothes." The reason for his astonishment was the discovery that this Book of the Law prescribed an observance of religion and a mode of worship which differed radically from the popular religious life of the people. So Josiah resolved to make the religious life of the people conform to the laws of the newly found Book. He inaugurated a great reform movement, a national revival of religion.

The origin and authorship of this Book of the Laws is shrouded in mystery. Who wrote it, and how it came to be found in the Temple, no one knows. When, however, the nature of the reform which was based upon it is carefully studied, the conclusion is inescapable that this Book of the Laws is preserved in the Old Testament under the name of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy, doubtless, contains more material than was found in the original Book of the Laws, but the book found by Hilkiah the priest is the core of it. The most probable theory of its origin is that it was composed by unknown religious leaders who had remained faithful to the worship of Jehovah. They saw with the advent of Josiah an opportunity of accomplishing a national revival of religion, and they took this means of bringing it about. They compiled this Book of the Laws and then "hid" it in the Temple, that the discovery of it there might invest it with additional authority. This was in the nature of a pious ruse, yet one can hardly call it fraud, and it certainly was not at variance with the ethical standards of the time. Jeremiah himself had nothing to do either with the composition of the Book of the Laws, or with the subsequent use that was made of it.

The significance of the Reform of Josiah based upon the Book of the Laws cannot be exaggerated. It constitutes a great moment in the religious history of the people. For the first time, the religious life of the people was based upon a written code. The people had, as it were, a written constitution of religious life and practice. It was a first step toward the recognition of an authoritative religious canón.

The Book of the Laws called for a revolution in the religious habits of the people. All local sanctuaries were to be abolished. These were the centers of pagan forms of worship. The priests were often immoral men and they borrowed many immoral rites from the other religions of the land. The prophetic books are full of the denunciations of the idolatries of these "high places." Accordingly, the Book of the Laws prescribed that they should be abandoned and that the worship of Jehovah should be observed only at Jerusalem. This abolition of local sanctuaries and limitation of the cultus to Jerusalem had far-reaching effects, as we shall see. This reform meant also the establishment of a priestly hierarchy at Jerusalem. Local priests became inferior servitors and assistants. The reform, also, was a hard blow at idolatry in any form, and monotheism, the worship of Jehovah alone became the established national faith. On the other hand, the centralization of worship at Jerusalem caused ceremonialism to take the place of an ethical and spiritual religion. It is true that Deuteronomy has much to say about ethics. Yet, if one read it carefully, one will discover that this is overtopped by its liturgical regulations. Thus a new chapter is opened in the development of the religious life of the Jewish people. All of these elements in the Reform of Josiah will be considered when we come to discuss Jeremiah's attitude toward it. This momentous reform is the second great event which occasions and determines the prophecies of Jeremiah. For the immediate results of the reformation were not deep or permanent. Many iniquities were still tolerated and the idea gained foot that punctilious observance of the new ritual would compensate for the lack of plain duties and obligations.

Political events now moved rapidly. Babylon, grown strong, made a direct attack upon moribund Nineveh. Egypt saw a chance to get something out of this for herself, and she also moved against Assyria. In order to do this, her armies must pass through Palestine. Josiah made the mistake of imagining that in this way the independence of Judah was threatened, and he resolved to resist the advance of the Egyptians under Necho. The fateful battle was fought at Megiddo in the year 608 B. C., a date which marks a turning point in the career of Jeremiah. For Josiah was slain, in the prime of his life, and a death blow was thus struck at the liberties of Judah. This unexpected calamity quenched the rising hopes of the prophetic party, and discredited the whole cause of reform. Moreover, it removed from the throne the noble figure of Josiah, and gave succession to a man of evil character, who undid all that Josiah had sought to accomplish and hastened the ruin of his people.

The immediate successor of Josiah was Jehoahaz, whom the people raised to power in preference to his elder brother, Jehoiakim. Although far from being as good a man as his father, he is referred to with regret by Jeremiah (22:10-12), doubtless because he contrasted so favorably with the king who came after him. For the reign of Jehoahaz lasted but three months. He was carried off by the Egyptians, and died an exile in Egypt. His elder brother Jehoiakim was appointed king in his place by Necho, for Judah was now but a province of Egypt, and in a pitiable state of weakness and confusion.

King Jehoiakim was a selfish, covetous, tyrannical ruler. He was chiefly concerned with the erection of a splendid palace for himself (Jeremiah 22:13, 14). His was a hardened and reckless character. He opposed from the beginning of his reign the whole prophetic movement, a reaction to which had already set in during the short reign of Jehoahaz. He murdered the prophet Uriah (Jeremiah 26:21-23) and was the mortal enemy of Jeremiah.

The coming upon the scene of Jehoiakim is thus the third great event which helps us to understand the personality, the career and the message of Jeremiah. It may be said that now for the first time the moral and spiritual stature of Jeremiah rises to its full height. The duel between these two men Jehoiakim and Jeremiah is one of the most grandiose encounters in all history. Jehoiakim is the object of Jeremiah's relentless opposition from the first. The story of it constitutes the tumultuous inner and outer history of the prophet's life during a whole decade. The prophecies of Jeremiah were written out for the express purpose of combating the evils of Jehoiakim's administration. Thus both the character and the message of the prophet were revealed against the dark background of Jehoiakim's reign.

After the accession of Jehoiakim, Nineveh fell before the Babylonians. That event tremendously impressed the imagination of the Jewish people, and it was celebrated in the hymn of hatred and triumph which makes up the short book of the prophet Nahum. For centuries Nineveh had been, for the Hebrews, the incarnation of evil, and its destruction could hardly be viewed otherwise by them than as a vindication of the justice of God. It marks the height of spiritual prophecy in Israel that it was precisely to Nineveh that the prophet Jonah, who personifies the conscience of the people, was told to go and preach the message of repentance and salvation.

But the fall of Nineveh, while it removed an ancient foe, was fraught with the gravest consequences for the little Southern Kingdom. Freed from the menace of Assyria, Babylon was now enabled to give its entire attention to Egypt which challenged its supremacy. The two nations moved swiftly against each other, and the issue was fought out at the battle of Carchemish in the year 605 B. C. The defeat of the Egyptians is referred to in Jeremiah 46:2. It was a critical battle in determining the fortunes of the Jewish people. Jehoiakim now became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, and Judah became a tributary state to Babylonia.

Jehoiakim remained loyal to Babylon for three years. Then he was persuaded by Necho to join Egypt in a revolt. At once (597 B. C.) the Babylonians invaded Judah, and in a battle fought outside the walls of Jerusalem, Jehoiakim was slain. The gruesome prophecy of Jeremiah that his body would receive no decent burial seems to have been literally fulfilled (Jeremiah 22:18, 19; 36:30). His reign ended, as Jeremiah predicted that it would end, in ignominy.

The Babylonians did not destroy Jerusalem at this time. But they carried away with them into captivity the flower of the people, the aristocracy and the priests, including Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, who had succeeded his father and had reigned for the short period of three months. His uncle Zedekiah was appointed in his stead.

The fourth element in the preaching of Jeremiah is his attitude toward all of these great political happenings. From the beginning he viewed the Babylonians as an instrument used by God for the punishment of Jerusalem; he declared resistance to her to be futile; he did all in his power to prevent the alliance with Egypt, and he freely predicted the ultimate triumph of Babylon and the destruction of the Jewish state. In his eyes the Babylonian invasion was divinely ordered, and the ruthless enemies of Judah were but fulfilling the Divine Will. That such an attitude did not make Jeremiah's life at Jerusalem a pleasant one, or cause him to be exactly popular, is an easy inference. Jeremiah draws for us vivid pictures of the social and religious chaos of this period, its debasing idolatries, the iniquity of its rulers, the poverty and degradation of the people. The hopes of Jeremiah for the future were henceforth centered solely upon the band of captives in Babylon. They were objects of contempt in the eyes of their degenerate brethren who remained at Jerusalem, but the prophet saw that on them depended the destinies of the Hebrew race.

The final chapter in the tragic story of the downfall of the Southern Kingdom may be quickly told. After nine years, Zedekiah, who had long been plotting against Babylon, openly revolted once more, relying, as Jehoiakim had done, upon the support of Egypt. The vengeance of the Babylonians was swift and final. In the year 586 B. C., after a long and terrible siege, Jerusalem was captured and utterly destroyed. The Temple was pillaged and demolished. The rest of the population was carried into captivity, only the poorest of the people being left behind to be vinedressers and husbandmen. Gedaliah was appointed governor. He was a friend of Jeremiah and believed with him that the safety of this meager remnant of the people lay in subservience to Babylon. But within two months he was murdered by a fanatic, Ishmael, who massacred also all of Gedaliah's adherents. The people became panic-stricken and, fearing the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar, migrated to Egypt where they disappear from history. The last glimpse which we have of them is by the banks of the Nile where they are gathered engaged in the fantastic worship of the Queen of Heaven.

The fifth and final element in the prophecies of Jeremiah is concerned with this dismal end of the life of his people. Jeremiah had been offered a safe-conduct into exile by the Babylonians who looked upon him as their ally. He chose instead to share the degradation of the remnant who remained at Jerusalem. He was carried away by the people into Egypt where the curtain falls on the life of people and prophet alike.

Such, in fewest possible words, is the historic background of the life and the message of Jeremiah. It is only in the light of these events that the man and his preaching can be understood. They furnish us the clue to his character and make intelligible and eloquent the message which has made his name immortal.

# CHAPTER II

## OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH'S LIFE

JEREMIAH was born at Anatoth, a little village lying only four miles northeast of Jerusalem about the year 650 B. C. This date is inferred from the fact that Jeremiah was young in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jeremiah 1:2, 6). When he was born, Manasseh's wicked reign was drawing to its close. Seventy-two years before, Samaria had fallen, and about sixty-four years were yet to elapse before the destruction of Jerusalem. Just before his birth, Egypt and the small states of Palestine had broken from allegiance to Assyria and war was imminent. This political situation may account for the name of the prophet. For "Jeremiah" means "whom God hurls" or "casts forth" —and no name more descriptive of the character or mission of the prophet could have been chosen. His father's name was Hilkiah (Jeremiah 1:1), a common Hebrew name, signifying "the Lord is my portion," and this was the name also of the priest who was concerned in the finding of the Book of the Laws, with whom Jeremiah's father is not to be confused. Both names, Hilkiah and Jeremiah, indicate that the family out of which Jeremiah was born was one which was loyal to the God of Israel at a time when, under Manasseh, many had lapsed from the true faith. Those who remained loyal doubtless suffered the unpopularity, if not actual persecution, which over-takes those who resist the conventional trend in religion and politics.

Probably the family of Jeremiah was descended from Eli; for Abiathar, the last of that descent to hold office as priest of the ark, had an ancestral estate at Anatoth to which he retired upon his dismissal by Solomon (1 Kings 2:26). Thus Jeremiah had a background of the best religious traditions, and he grew up within the atmosphere of a godly Hebrew home. We may compare his inheritance and training with that of a boy born in a New England parsonage with a long line of ministerial ancestors. His family was like that of the Beecher and the Abbott families, in the record of which much national as well as religious history is interwoven. Everything that was good in Hebrew life was a part of his intellectual and moral and spiritual inheritance. As a lad, he was doubtless instructed by his father (who may or may not himself have been a priest) in the knowledge of Israel's past, her greatness, her ideals, her decay and degradation, and also in the rallying prophecies of Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. All of this appears in Jeremiah's earliest writings. Yet Jeremiah's utterances, when at last he began to speak, were no mere reflection of what he had learned from human sources, or had been taught by human lips. They had a higher authenticity. Their origin was the Divine knowledge and the Divine will. Like all great spiritual prophets, like Paul of the New Testament, Jeremiah claims for himself independence of all secondary and human sources of inspiration: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee: I have appointed thee for a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Anatoth, where Jeremiah was born, had been a residence of priests since David's day (Jeremiah 1:1, 29:27, 32:7). It still keeps its ancient name Anata. It lies hidden from the main road between Jerusalem and the North. The surrounding territory has the same open, arid landscape in which several other prophets were bred. In Jeremiah's messages, all the features of this landscape are reflected: the hot desert, the village herds, the waste hills, the wild animals. The territory had been Benjamin's, the tribe of the mad king Saul, of the cursing Shimei. It was a hard, thorny soil that needed deep plowing. It is out of such soil that strong men are often reared. "What," said an English visitor to New England, surveying for the first time its rocky soil, "What can you raise here?" "Here," came the proud answer, "we raise men."

> The boy grew up[1] [George Adam Smith has eloquently written] with many ghosts about him: Rachel weeping for her children; the Levite and his murdered wife; Saul's sullen figure, and other nameless fugitives. . . . The empty shimmering desert and the stony land thronged with such tragedies—a not unfit nursery for such a prophet.

Only four miles away, an hour's walk, lay Jerusalem, and the intercourse was close between the two. We see how the history of Jerusalem may have influenced the boy. All the political and social news of those troubled years would trickle into Anatoth, all the reverberations of the Assyrian and Scythian and Babylonian campaigns, could there distinctly be heard.

Jeremiah was no recluse. The pages of his book are richly filled with allusions to life in both town and country. He seems from the first to have been a sensitive soul, open to every impression from nature and from life. He watched the farmer in the field (4:3), the children in the street (6:11), the silver refiners and the potters at their work (6:28, 30; 18:3, 6); he knew the strifes of debtor and creditor (15:10), the humiliation of thieves when caught (2:26), the lamentations for the dead (16:4), the festivals of brides and weddings (2:32; 7:34).

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[1] *Jeremiah,* pp. 68-69.

All of these scenes as they are described by Jeremiah describe in their turn a man at once discerning and friendly, whose piety involved no asceticism, who had a thorough knowledge of history and life. A careful study of these formative years of Jeremiah's life reveals a man not only of deep religious conviction, but of great intellectual vigor. In him spirituality and reasoning power were linked. His subsequent career shows what a strong grasp he had of difficult situations. He used his mind on every problem which confronted him. He dared, as we shall see, even to challenge a divine impulse until consent can be based on conviction.

Together with trained powers of observation, Jeremiah possessed a soul sensitive to nature. "In this which we may call the "sense of nature" (Naturgefühl), he has no equal among the prophets. He was born to be a poet, although doomed to spend his life in controversy. It is not by any mere enumeration of his references to nature that one can vindicate his claim in this respect."[2] As with Wordsworth, it is the "sense of community between nature and man . . . of that larger life in which his own and his people's is at once rooted and realized that comes out in almost every page of Jeremiah's writings. With a quick, patient and observing eye he followed nature's different changeful moods," and these were reflected in his own soul. To him a landscape is in effect a "state of mind." "Jeremiah is the one instance of a prophet who traces the birth of his spiritual life to the influence of nature" (Jeremiah 1:11). Shy, sensitive, gentle and loving with beautiful poetical imagination, keen moral insight, profound religious devotion, Jeremiah must have been a unique personality even in his youth.[3]

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[2] J. R. Gillis, *Jeremiah*, pp. 15-16.

When Jeremiah was eleven years old, Manasseh had died at last and the young king Josiah had come to the throne. And thirteen years later (Jeremiah 1:2) when Jeremiah was twenty-four years of age (627-6 B. C.) came his call to be a prophet. Behind that call were inheritance, tradition, training, none the less real because they were unconscious, and doubtless many premonitions of his future career. But the call itself was sudden, abrupt and charged with tremendous weight and meaning. It was a stupendous consciousness, an inrush of Divine possession which controlled the whole man. Henceforth, he no longer belonged to himself. He belonged to God. He was merely an instrument in the hands of the Divine will. His life really dates from the hour of this call. Thenceforth he steps out on the stage of history, a God-possessed soul.

His prophetic ministry was begun at his home village of Anatoth. For at least five years, he remained there without acquiring any great reputation as a prophet. For in the year 621 B. C. came the great Reformation of Josiah, and apparently Jeremiah was not consulted by the prophetic party which "engineered" this religious *coup d'état*. During this period, therefore, it is safe to assume that he was little known in Jerusalem. His prophecies at Anatoth doubtless concerned social sins, and included a condemnation of the idolatries and other pagan practices of the rural altars. It was all after the manner of Amos and Hosea. Thus far there was nothing original in the prophet's outlook and nothing novel in his message. This contained a verdict on the people's history, with which he had become familiar, and the coming judgment upon the people for their apostasy. Samples of this early preaching of Jeremiah are found in the first and second chapters of his book. The prophet is being trained for his mission. These are his years as apprentice in the prophetic office.

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[3] Julius A. Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament,* p. 143.

It was during these early years at Anatoth, also, that the terrific incursion of the Scythians (cir. 630-627 B. C.) took place. This awoke in the soul of Jeremiah a conviction that never left him: that out of the North that punishment was to come which would spell the doom of recreant Judah. A major motif in the total message of Jeremiah dates from this period of his life. The dramatic nature of these Scythian prophecies doubtless brought him into public notice.

During these years we must imagine that his nature expanded and that his spiritual powers were gradually developed. Clearer and clearer grew his insight. There was revealed to him the moral destitution of the people, and his capacities of moral indignation grew until they became the inmost passion of his soul. There came to him increasing conviction of the operation of the Divine will which would stop at nothing for the achievement of its ultimate moral purpose. There was born in his sensitive soul that irresistible sense of the part that he was to play in this great tragedy, and that human shrinking from it, which constitutes the spiritual contradiction of his entire career. And the loneliness which afterward completely enveloped him had its beginnings in these early years at

Anatoth. He never married (Jeremiah 16:2); he became gradually estranged from his friends. His fellow-townsmen came first to distrust him and then to hate him (11:19-21). There he had his first taste of the unpopularity and persecution which became later the commonplace of his life. The sad outlines of his entire career begin to disclose themselves from the earliest days of his ministry.

At just what time Jeremiah removed from Anatoth to Jerusalem, we do not know. But we do know that from his thirtieth year onward, the sphere of his operations lay in "the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem." Like Jesus of Nazareth, of whom he was the prototype and spiritual forerunner, he was thirty years of age when he came forth in the plenitude of his power and full consciousness of his mission to preach and to guide and control the future destiny of his people. The geographical sphere of his operations was even more restricted than that of Jesus. But Jerusalem and the surrounding country for the next forty years heard the ceaseless reverberation of his prophecy. It is remarkable that the name of Jeremiah is not once mentioned in the Books of the Kings; for from the year 621 B.C. onward, there was not one political event in what remained of Hebrew history with which he was not intimately related.

During the reign of Josiah, the influence and reputation of Jeremiah gradually increased. The Reformation of Josiah gave him the opportunity of throwing the full weight of his influence in its support—a support which he subsequently modified and withdrew. There were twelve years of this activity. He had now transferred his residence to Jerusalem. Anatoth, because of the hatred which his support of the Reform had aroused, had ceased to be for him a comfortable place to live. Jeremiah thus became a familiar and prominent figure in the capital and in the countryside. And the better he was known, the more he was hated. The fearlessness of his denunciation of social sin and religious apostasy; the openness with which he foretold Divine punishment of which alien nations were to be the agents; the fact that he approved the destruction and desertion of rural altars which deprived local priests of their prestige and even of their living—all these combined to make Jeremiah disliked and distrusted. He had from the first to walk in the way of a prophet—and that never has been and never will be a primrose path.

But Jeremiah's hour had not yet struck. Had he died before 608 B. C., his name might never have come down to us. It was not until he was forty-two years old that the events happened which gave him his great spiritual opportunity, and revealed his full spiritual stature.

In the year 607 B. C., Nineveh fell before Babylon. The following year Egypt roused herself to challenge Babylon and marched through Palestine, where her progress was opposed by Josiah, who fell on the field at the battle of Megiddo. This is the turning point in the history of the life of Jeremiah. Thus far the people may have hated him, but his work was done and his message was delivered in the knowledge that King Josiah, that "the administration," as it were, was behind him. It was the happiest period, if such a term may be used of any portion of Jeremiah's life, of the prophet's career.

But with the death of Josiah, all of this was changed. After the brief reign of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim came to the throne. Frivolous, despotic, brutal, he became the detestation of all serious-minded men.

Jeremiah loathed him from the beginning to the end of his reign. He execrated everything that he was, as man and king. "They shalt not lament him saying, Ah, my brother! or, Ah, sister! . . . Ah, Lord! or, Ah, his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (22:19).

Jeremiah and Jehoiakim were human opposites. And for thirteen long years, while Jerusalem was hastening to its end on an irresistible current of political events, these two confronted each other in a dramatic struggle which has few parallels in history. It was a spiritual duel which for force and passion transcends that between Luther and the German Emperor, or between John Knox and Mary, Queen of Scots. It was not easy to be a prophet even in Josiah's time. But with Jehoiakim, Manasseh had come to life again. The astonishing thing is that Jeremiah lived as long as he did. An unexplained miracle of history is the long life of this prophet. In him was fulfilled the word of the Seer of Patmos: "And I will give [power] unto my . . . witnesses. These have the power . . . to smite the earth as often as they will . . . and when they shall have finished their testimony . . . the beast . . . shall overcome them and kill them" (Rev. 11:3, 6, 7).

Jeremiah's conflicts, struggles, and sufferings began the moment that Jehoiakim ascended the throne. There followed at once a persecution of the prophetic party, and Jeremiah came in for his full share of it. All of the vindictive hatred of the local priests, of the pseudo-patriots, of royalty, was now directed against him. But Jeremiah neither flinched nor retracted. His courage never weakened. History does not present us with a nobler figure than Jeremiah during these thirteen terrible years. So dramatic are some of the scenes in this struggle that it is sheer tragedy that the record of them is so deeply buried in the interior of the book of Jeremiah that the average Bible reader knows nothing about them at all. Yet they are worthy to stand beside the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, or the stories of Daniel and his friends at the court of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

It could not have been long after Jehoiakim had become king that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and told him to "go down to the house of the King of Judah" and prophesy against him to his face. And he went (Jeremiah 22:1-9). When he became a prophet the Lord had promised him that he should not be "dismayed at them" (Jeremiah 1:17). And he was not dismayed. He did not flee like another prophet, Uriah, who was afraid and lost his life (Jeremiah 26:20-23). He stood his ground and he lost neither his courage nor his life.

A little later, the word of the Lord came to him again and he prophesied in the streets of Jerusalem and told the people that the Lord was prepared to make "this city an astonishment and a hissing" (Jeremiah 19:8). And when Pashhur the priest heard it, he "smote Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Benjamin (20:2). But the prophet, unterrified, told Pashur to his face that he would become a terror to himself and to all his friends and that he and all his house would go into captivity.

Still later, he preached a terrible sermon openly in the Temple, just as Savonarola did centuries later in the Duomo at Florence, flaying the people for their sins, and predicting national disaster because of them.

And he ended it with the words: "But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves . . . for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." And so convincing was his defense, so profound was the impression he produced that it was not he who spoke but God who had spoken, that the "princes and all the people (said) unto the priests . . . this man is not worthy of death for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God" (Jeremiah 26:14-16).

These years were all the more terrible for Jeremiah because of that inner spiritual contradiction of which mention has already been made. He was assailed not only by "foes without," but also by "fears within." These contending internal emotions form one of the strangest chapters in religious psychology. The man revolted from his task; he rebelled against the thing which a divine impulse, which he could not resist, compelled him to perform. He did not hesitate to question the right of God to ask him to do it, or even to arraign the moral character of God who drove him to it. "And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary with forbearing and I cannot contain." (Jeremiah 20:9). If it is hard to explain how Jeremiah escaped death at the hands of Jehoiakim, it is not easy to understand how flesh and blood could stand the terrific strain of the internal conflicts of this delicate and sensitive soul.

It was in the last years of the reign of Jehoiakim that Jeremiah, with the aid of his faithful friend and amanuensis Baruch, determined to put his prophecies in writing in a final effort to persuade king and people that their ultimate salvation lay in no political alliance with Egypt or resistance to Babylon, but in a return to the Lord, His ways, His commandments. When the king contemptuously burned the roll of these prophecies which his servants brought him (Jeremiah 36:23), Jeremiah wrote them out again and added some more. The full story will be told in the next chapter. It was Jeremiah's last effort to save king and people from the doom which confronted them.

In the year 605 B. C., the battle of Carchemish was fought, which decided the issue between Egypt and Babylon. Necho, king of Egypt, was decisively defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and with this event a new chapter opens in the life of Jeremiah. Now Babylon loomed. Babylon was no longer a specter; it became a portent. Jeremiah now knew for a certainty that his prophetic presentiments were from God. Like a flash of lightning, Carchemish lit up the whole plan and purpose of God. Conviction now seized the mind of Jeremiah that it was God's will that Babylon should be the instrument of God for the punishment of Jerusalem (chapter 25). Strangely enough, Jeremiah for more than thirty years had correctly read the course of history. And he saw down clearly in what remained of history for the Hebrew nation. Followed, after three years, the revolt against Babylon with Egypt as ally. Followed the death of Jehoiakim, the surrender of Jerusalem and the first captivity. With what conflicting emotions must Jeremiah have beheld these swiftly moving events which at the same time vindicated the truth of his prophecy and spelled the ruin of the people.

For injustice is done to the character of the prophet if one imagines him to be without sorrow for the people whose ruin he foresaw and foretold. The final chapters in the life of the prophet prove the utter opposite. He identified himself so closely with the fate of the people, he took their sorrows so utterly upon his own soul, that it has been surmised, and not without reason, that when the Great Prophet of the Exile wrote his immortal chapter about the suffering servant (Isaiah 53), he had Jeremiah in mind while he dimly foresaw the Savior. There is hardly a verse in that chapter which may not in all literalness be applied to Jeremiah:

> Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed.

How descriptive these words are of the character of Jeremiah, the closing events in the history of Jerusalem make startlingly clear. Zedekiah was made king after the brief interregnum of Jehoiakim who, after being king for three months, had his eyes put out by the Babylonians and was carried away a blind captive into oblivion. Zedekiah was a weak, vacillating monarch, who believed in Jeremiah, but was unable to resist the pressure brought upon him by the nationalists, the priests and the princes, who were still unreconciled to being subservient to Babylon. In their eyes, Jeremiah was a traitor. And after one of his open prophecies that resistance to Babylon meant the final destruction of Jerusalem, they persuaded the king to have him arrested and put in the court of the prison (Jeremiah 32:3, 33:1), and when he persisted in his denunciations of their policy, they had him put in a dungeon and left there to die. He was rescued finally by the fidelity of an Ethiopian servant who persuaded the king to permit his release (Jeremiah 38:6-13). History has few instances of heroism to match this story out of the life of Jeremiah, lying in the darkness of that dungeon, but still maintaining his faith in God and his unalterable purpose to do and to declare His will.

The vacillating monarch finally yielded to the importunities of the pseudo-patriots, with the result that Jerusalem was again captured and destroyed and all but a beggarly remnant of the people were carried into exile. And the final act in the life of the prophet illustrates the depth of his spiritual nature and his capacities of self-sacrifice. Given the choice by the Babylonians of going into exile where doubtless he would have been treated with consideration or even with distinction because he had seemed to favor the Babylonian cause, he elected to remain with the rabble at Jerusalem, to share their ignominy and degradation (Jeremiah 39:11-13). He bore their griefs and he carried their sorrows. And after the ill-fated revolt of Ishmael, the panic-stricken people carried him away with them in their return to Egypt, a tragic conclusion of their national history which had begun with their deliverance from Pharaoh under Moses centuries before. The last glimpse we have of Jeremiah is standing among this hapless crowd of refugees in Egypt prophesying once more in the name of the Lord against the grotesque perversion of their faith in the worship of the Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 44). Yet his voice rings with the same courage and conviction as in the beginning of his long and tragic career.

Thus ends the life of this extraordinary man. How he died, no one knows. Tradition has it that he was finally put to death by his infuriated countrymen. But he had borne his witness. He had done his work. In his entire career, he had not been cheered by a single ray of light. Failure was written across his life from beginning to end, as men usually reckon failure. But he had won one of the most singular successes in all spiritual history. He towers high above the level of common humanity. He has his place secure in the Pantheon of the great prophets of the Spirit of God.

# CHAPTER III

## THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah lived, as we have seen, from the closing years of Manasseh's reign, until after the destruction of Jerusalem. He prophesied from about 625 B. C. until the end of his life forty years later. But it needs to be remembered that it was only late in his prophetic career that he put any of his prophecies into writing. We are given an elaborate account of the circumstances under which this was done, and in this the book of Jeremiah is unique among the books of the Bible.

It was not until after the battle of Carchemish (605 B. C.), when Egypt was finally subdued by Babylon, and Jerusalem was thus exposed to the attack of this powerful Northern nation, that Jeremiah felt impelled to put his prophecies in written form. For nearly a quarter of a century, he had been preaching (Jeremiah 25:3). He may have had notes and outlines. We do not know. But only when the doom of Jerusalem seemed to him to be inevitable, came the distinct call of God to reduce his prophecies to writing. This is all explained to us in the thirty-sixth chapter of his book.

A careful reading of this chapter yields us the following data. We are given the exact date of this composition (verse 1), the year 604 B. C. The method is described (verse 4). He wrote "from the mouth." He dictated to Baruch, his friend and amanuensis. The reason is given why at first the prophecies were written out (verse 3). This was not done from any purely literary motive. It was not done because Jeremiah felt that his sermons were worthy to be preserved and should be handed down to posterity. The reason was urgent, impersonal, practical. The prophecies if written out might be read by the people. They might become a flaming tract for the times. They might accomplish what the spoken message had failed to bring to pass. They might convert the people.

The chapter describes to us the fate of this first edition of the prophet's sermons (verses 10-25). Baruch carried them to the Temple at the time of a solemn service of fasting and prayer which was being held because of the approach of the Babylonians. He read them there "in the ears of the people." When this reading was reported to the princes of the people, they sent for Baruch and asked him to read the sermons to them, and he did. And when they had heard them they asked Baruch how these prophecies came to be written. And Baruch said that Jeremiah had dictated them. Then the princes said that they would tell King Jehoiakim about them. And when the king heard what Jeremiah had written, he sent for the copy. As it happened, he was sitting in front of the fireplace. His scribe Jehudi read Jeremiah's sermons aloud to him; and after he had read a few of them, he took out his penknife at the king's direction and cut them out of the roll and put them into the fire and continued to do this until all had been destroyed.

When this was reported to Jeremiah, the prophet sat down and dictated the sermons again, and added a good many more to them; and he told Baruch to tell Jehoiakim that God would punish him with ignominious death and destroy the city and the land (verses 27-32). This second edition of Jeremiah's prophecies was evidently written from a new motive and with a new purpose. The first object in writing had failed. The king would not allow these messages to be read or circulated among the people. The purpose now was to give a "permanent form to all the fruits of Jeremiah's previous ministry." [1] The prophet's life was in danger. He desired to have his interpretation of the Will of God toward this people a matter of permanent record.

Here, then, are two versions of the prophecies of Jeremiah, out of his own mouth, written about the year 604 B. C. What portions of the present book of Jeremiah may we imagine to have been included in the first copy which Jehoiakim burned up? Without doubt, it was brief. It was "read three times over on the same day, and was probably limited to such (prophecies) as were sufficient for its practical purpose of moving the people of Judah to repentance at a Fast where their hearts would be most inclined that way." [2] It was designed to bring Judah to repentance by an announcement of the evil which God purposed to bring upon her. From this roll, we should necessarily exclude all those prophecies which we have reason to suppose were later than 604 B. C. But such prophecies as Jeremiah had spoken with reference to Judah preceding that date would be reproduced in it. Being dictated mainly from memory, prophecies which were uttered twenty-three years before cannot have been reproduced exactly as they were originally spoken. Some scholars have argued that up to this time Jeremiah had written out none of his prophecies, and that thus we have them only in substance and not in the form in which they were originally uttered. "Several of the early prophecies [however] bear so unmistakably the marks of the time when they were originally uttered, and are so full of the prophet's youthful energy and fire that we cannot regard them as compositions of some twenty years later."[3] The reasonable conclusion is that he had preserved written notes of some of his prophecies, which he felt free to alter and expand when he wrote them out at a later date. All that we can say with certainty is that we have in essence the messages of the prophet as they were given to him from time to time to declare to the people.

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[1] George Adam Smith, op. cit., p. 25.

[2] George Adam Smith, ibid., pp. 24-25.

The "new and enlarged edition" of the prophet's utterances, written after the first and shorter version had been destroyed, included all that were in the first copy, together with many additions. His enforced retirement, due to Jehoiakim's order that he be arrested (36:26), gave him time and freedom to make a larger selection, if not a complete record, of his previous prophecies. Naturally all of the prophecies of so long a ministry could not be recalled or reproduced. The second edition also may have included some of the prophet's personal reflections and prayers, together with various attacks on Jehoiakim's policy and character. But just what prophecies were in the first edition and which were added to the second must always remain largely a matter of conjecture.

Here, then, as forming the nucleus of the present Book of Jeremiah, are these two rolls of which we have the account in chapter 36. But now there are prophecies in this book which relate to events after 604 B. C., when these two editions of his earlier prophecies were dictated. For example, in chapter 29, we have a letter written to the exiles in Babylon. In chapter 44, we have some prophecies of Jeremiah delivered away down in Egypt at the very end of his life. And there are many others. So, in the years following 604 B. C., we must imagine that Jeremiah dictated other prophecies now incorporated in our present book of Jeremiah. Into these three groups falls all the material belonging to Jeremiah himself, found in the book which bears his name.

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[3] A. S. Peake, *Jeremiah,* II, p. 152.

But now, in addition to Jeremiah's own prophecies, we have a series of narratives, which are to be found chiefly in the last twenty-five chapters of the book, dealing with incidents and events in his career. These were written by Baruch, to whom as we have just seen, Jeremiah dictated his prophecies. Baruch seems to have been to Jeremiah what Luke was to Paul. He came from an illustrious family (Jeremiah 51:59), his brother Seraiah being chief chamberlain when Zedekiah was king. He had become impressed by the personality of Jeremiah, and accepted the dangerous yet glorious opportunity of sharing the prophet's life and work. In chapter 45 we have the account of the call of Baruch to this mission. It began with the task of writing out the prophecies of Jeremiah and carrying them to the people and to the princes. The words: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not," "braced the young nobleman to 'drink the cup,' to face the wrathful multitude"[4] and to be Jeremiah's emissary to the court of Jehoiakim. Thereafter Baruch never left the prophet. He became an eyewitness of all that happened afterward. He accompanied Jeremiah step by step along his perilous pilgrimage. When Jerusalem fell, he remained with Jeremiah at Mizpah (40:6). When Jeremiah went down into Egypt with the miserable refugees, Baruch went with him (43:6), and at some period or other after the death of the prophet, Baruch wrote down the narrative which was later incorporated in the Book of Jeremiah. These narratives have to do with various episodes in the life of Jeremiah before the dictation of his prophecies (see chapters 19:14, 20:1-6, 26:7ff.), and with nearly all of his career after that date (604 B. C.). The earliest events in the prophet's life: his call to be a prophet, his share in Josiah's reform, the treatment he received at the hands of his fellow-townsmen of Anatoth, are told in the first person, and are thus the work of Jeremiah himself. Yet, although Baruch appeared late on the scene, he performed a work of the utmost value, giving us authentic information concerning episodes in the life of Jeremiah of which otherwise we might have had no knowledge. They illuminate his character for us, and help us to understand the meaning and the occasion of many of his prophecies.

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[4] Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible,* art., "Baruch."

It seems probable that the prophecies of Jeremiah and the narratives of Baruch maintained an independent existence for some time. During this period, the original form of Jeremiah's prophecies was doubtless altered and expanded. No editor in our day would feel that he had any right to change the original form of another's words. Standards of literary ethics, like moral standards in general, differ from age to age. Then an editor felt perfectly free not only to alter the form of what another had written, but to add his own compositions, or any thing that others may have written, and to ascribe the whole to the author whose writings were being compiled or edited, as if it were all his. If an author were well known, this method would insure a circulation and an authority for writings which otherwise would have little attention or influence. There are many instances of this kind of literary work to be found in the Old Testament books, and the scholars are kept busy endeavoring to decide what was the original form of the writing, and what was subsequently added to it by others.

The book of Jeremiah presents such difficulties. We find in it some prophecies which refer to the exile and to events after the exile (30, 31:7-11) which could not possibly have been written by Jeremiah himself. And, besides these, we have scattered dates, titles, notes, insertions, and historical settings—all later than Jeremiah himself. From all this it appears that the book as we now have it was a gradual growth over a considerable period of time, and that it was not all written by one hand. Just how or when the different parts were assembled and put in their present form we cannot know. It is probable that this was done during the second half of the exile, although certain passages may have been added at even a later date. Also, subsequent additions and modifications may have been made even after the book was put together, just as to-day we have different editions of a book with alterations and added material.

The problem is a pretty one of deciding just what portions of the book belong to Jeremiah himself, and what parts of it must be ascribed to later authors and editors. The book of Jeremiah has thus become a kind of happy hunting ground for scholars whose chief interest lies in this kind of literary analysis. As we might expect, there are extremists in both directions. A very radical critic (Duhm) considers that we have from Jeremiah only sixty short poems. He insists that Jeremiah's work was all written in poetical form, and only so much poetry as is written in a certain (Quina) rhythm belongs to Jeremiah himself, in all about two hundred and eighty verses. "To Baruch's biography about 220 verses are reckoned. Roughly speaking, then, 500 verses belong to Jeremiah and Baruch, leaving 850 verses, or about two-thirds of the book to later editors and supplementers."[5] More conservative scholars, however, reach very different conclusions. Some ascribe all but a few chapters to Jeremiah and Baruch, allowing for minor alterations or additions.

The whole subject, however, is one which the average Bible student may leave to the scholars to discuss. As George Adam Smith says, these questions "so little affect our estimates of the prophet and of his teaching, that we may leave them alone."[6] However the material may have been collected, it portrays the splendid figure of Jeremiah in clear and bold outlines; it describes with singular precision and detail the outward events of his career; it announces the essence and burden of his message with an authenticity that no one can question; and it takes us into the innermost recesses of the prophet's spirit and uncovers the deepest feelings of this pure and sensitive soul.

The history of the book of Jeremiah, therefore, may be summarized thus:

1. Shortly after the battle of Carchemish, 605 B. C., Jeremiah received a definite call to write down his prophecies (Jeremiah 36:1-3). He did this, making a short collection of those relating to Judah, with the specific object of producing repentance of king and people. This version was destroyed by king Jehoiakim.

2. Some time later (just when, and covering how long a time we cannot know), Jeremiah dictated his

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[5] See A. S. Peake, op. cit. Vol. 1, Introduction, p. 63.

[6] *Jeremiah,* pp. 29-30.

prophecies again, including those in the original version and adding many others.

3. Still later, he added more prophecies from time to time, relating to subsequent events.

4. Baruch, Jeremiah's companion and amanuensis, not only wrote from dictation Jeremiah's own prophecies, but he prepared considerable biographical material of his own relating to events in Jeremiah's life from 604 B. C. onward.

5. Later on, during the exile, subsequent editors added certain other prophecies, including them all in the "Book of Jeremiah."

6. The whole was afterwards edited with historical notes, dates and other material either in Babylon or in Palestine by unknown hands.

Thus the book was the result of a long development, reaching far beyond Jeremiah's time. The book of Jeremiah "is not so much a book, the product of a single mind as a literature, the product of many minds and of many divers ages."[7]

The reading of the book of Jeremiah would be far easier and more intelligible if the editors, before they had finished with the work, had arranged all of this material in chronological order, and had indicated plainly what belonged to Jeremiah and what did not. But they did not do this. They did not have the practical needs of the twentieth century Bible student in mind when they did their work. This work must be done by the modern editor, if Jeremiah is to be read with pleasure and profit.[8] Of course, this can never be done with accuracy. Always there will be much room for difference of opinion. Does this particular bit of prophecy belong to Jeremiah, or was it foisted upon him by a later editor? Does this chapter, or portion of a chapter lacking all date or reference which would help us to date it, belong to this or that period in Jeremiah's life? Here are questions which cannot be settled. But at least a provisional work can be done, which will go far to clear up the present confusion and to make a straight path through the bewilderment of the book as it now exists.

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[7] J. R. Gillis, *Jeremiah,* p. 30.

[8] The reader is referred to C. F. Kent's "Jeremiah" in *Sermons, Epistles and Apocalypses of Israel's Prophets.* The material is arranged in chronological order in a fresh translation.

For the purpose of the present discussion, an outline of the material has been attempted which seems both probable and reasonable, and enables us to follow in intelligible fashion the development of Jeremiah's spiritual experience. In general, it is based upon the commentary of A. S. Peake, who represents the best scholarship, without being extreme or eccentric in his judgments. The present writer has not hesitated, however, at times to arrange and to date these prophecies according to his own ideas. No claim of infallibility in this arrangement is made or needs to be made. Always in such a matter there is plenty of room for a difference of opinion.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE GENIUS OF PROPHECY

"Old Testament prophecy is a phenomenon to which the history of religion affords no real parallel."[1] It cannot be classified with any other literature of the soul. The prophets cannot be matched by any other religious leaders or teachers which the world has ever known. They belong in a class by themselves, both by what they set themselves to do, and in the way in which they did it. In the kind of men they were, in the things which they accomplished, they are a unique spiritual phenomenon. Prophecy is the most remarkable fact not only in Hebrew history, but in the moral development of the human race down to the coming of Jesus Christ.

The word "prophet," etymologically, means one who speaks forth, or speaks out. He is an announcer of the Word and Will of God. The prophets were all holy men, waiting for the salvation of God, penetrated by the fact of sin, and working in the strength of God. Their very names tell the kind of men they were: "Man of God," "Servant of Jehovah," "Messenger of Jehovah," "Interpreter," "Watchman." They all stood on high towers, speakers, heralds, of the will of God to men. The world had never seen such men before. It has never seen such a succession of men since. God raised them for their peculiar mission. If we try to classify them we see how impossible it is.

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[1] Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 1.

It is impossible to class them with the soothsayers, augurers, wise men or diviners of antiquity. They did not consult birds or the casting of lots. The roots of prophecy may go back to these superstitious beginnings, but in the developed form in which we find it in the later Old Testament, it has lost all resemblance to its origins. All religions have had something akin to prophecy based on the conviction that there is a supernatural Power on whose good-will the destiny of man depends, who, under certain conditions, would make that will known to men. The method by which this was done was either external, by omens, or internal, by mystical inspiration. Readers of Greek and Roman history are perfectly familiar with prophecy in this sense. And, in this sense also we find it at the beginnings of Hebrew history.[2] From the time of Elijah, however, Hebrew prophecy became increasingly ethical and religious, a new and unique revelation of the truth and will of God. Recall the figure of Amos denouncing the people of the Northern Kingdom for their sins, and declaring that for punishment they will be destroyed by the Assyrians, and in contrast think of Alexander sending gifts to Delphi to obtain a favorable augury for his campaigns against the Persians.

But if the prophets cannot be compared with soothsayers, neither can they be put in the same class with the teachers and philosophers of antiquity. You cannot compare them with men like Plato and Aristotle who wrought out of their profound intellectual and moral natures high and noble conceptions of the ideal State, who laid the foundations of a political philosophy, and left to the world fundamental ideas concerning the organization of human society. The prophets were not primarily political thinkers. They were preachers. They did not search after the truth, the truth had captured them. They did not theorize concerning the nature of the State. They announced the will of God. He was directing, controlling the people, and shaping them to His own moral ends.

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[2] The first mention of prophets as such occurs in the Book of Samuel (1 Samuel 10:5). These "prophets" seem to be successors of the heathen diviners (Deuteronomy 18:9-15). They were located in the larger cities (2 Kings 2:5) and especially at old sanctuaries (2 Kings 2:3, 4:38); they resembled the prophets of Baal in their relation to Jehovah (1 Kings 18:19, 22); they were permitted to marry and do business (2 Kings 4:1); certain of them lived together (2 Kings 4:38-41, 2 Kings 6:1-7). Probably they expected material rewards (2 Kings 5:22); much frenzy accompanied their religious life (2 Kings 9:11, 12); and they looked for omens as a sign of the Divine will (2 Samuel 5:24).

If the prophets cannot be called soothsayers or scholars, neither can they be put beside the statesmen and politicians that the world has known. All of the prophets had to do with politics and with national affairs. But in a new and extraordinary fashion, the national ideal was not an end in itself but the means to an end. They were true patriots in that they were ambitious for their country. But their ambition was that their country should be the willing, and, if necessary, the suffering servant of a moral and spiritual ideal. They held out the promise of peace and prosperity to the people only on the condition that they were true to this ideal. And they did not hesitate to pronounce judgment and doom if the people were faithless to their mission. Such patriots the world had never seen before, who were not afraid to declare:

> What makes a nation great and keeps it so,
> What ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat,

and who dared to say openly that God Himself would overthrow His own people that they might learn that upon righteousness alone can a nation rest, and that the breath of God will overturn the sinful works of men.

The nature of the inspiration of the Old Testament prophets presents an interesting problem to the student of the psychology of religion. In what respect did this form of inspiration differentiate itself from a state of spiritual ecstasy? Were these men in a kind of trance? Did they cease in a sense to be themselves? Were they the more or less unconscious medium of a Divine inspiration which came to them unsought and unawares? How could they be sure that the message which it was given to them to declare was of God and not of themselves? What gave them the absolute sense of Divine authority? How could they be sure that the message which they had received came from God, whereas other "false" prophets were self-deceived and imagined that they were "inspired" when really they were not?[3]

Here are questions which lead us into a region of thought which defies strict analysis. In a sense, the problem does not permit a logical solution. There are some considerations, however, which may help us to understand the prophetic state of mind.[4]

These men remained normal human beings. What they had to say was not the Word of the Lord, transmitted through a consciousness emptied of itself, but was the effect of that word on sensitive human hearts which gave forth their own peculiar tones "like the Æolian harp when its strings are swept by the wind." The essential difference between pagan and Bible inspiration lies at just this point. The pagan oracles ceased to be themselves. They were emptied of their own proper consciousness and became merely the mouthpiece of the Divine will. But Bible inspiration did not transcend the limits of human personality and operated within the nature and development of the soul of the prophet.[5] The Divine Message suffered nothing from its transmission through human personality. Yet that personality retained its proper identity and suffered the ebb and flow of the tides of the spirit.[6]

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[3] This question is further dealt with in chapter XIV, pp. 264ff.

[4] See A. B. Bruce, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 115-143.

Again it is clear that the inspiration of the prophets was essentially spiritual and moral in its nature. It takes the place which divination and purely oracular utterances occupied in other religions. The prophets did forecast the future, and prediction, as we shall see, was an integral part of their message. But always it had a religious basis and a religious motive. It is this close and permanent association between religion and prophetic inspiration which is its distinctive feature.[7] This form of inspiration always had an ethical motive, a moral and religious aim. There was always a close and enduring bond between the prophetic consciousness and the religion of Israel. The inspiration of the prophets served the moral and spiritual purposes of God toward His people.[8] The prophets were conscious of being the agents of God, intermediaries between God and His people. The message which they have received was not for them nor for any other individual. It was for the people as a whole. "Go prophesy to my people" is the word to which they all respond. Thus Old Testament prophecy was an essential institution for the development of the moral and religious life of the Hebrew people. In this, again, it differs from all other forms of religious inspiration of which we have historical knowledge.

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[5] See George Matheson, *Spiritual Development of St. Paul,* pp. 4, 5.

[6] For a further discussion of this subject, see chapter XII, p. 220.

[7] ". . . Instead of developing, as did the wise man or seer of Israel, into the mouthpiece of God in His demand for the righteousness of man, the Roman diviner merely assisted the pontifex in his work of robbing religion of the idea of righteousness. Divination seems to be a universal instinct of human nature, a perfectly natural instinct, arising out of man's daily needs, hopes, fears; but though it may have had the chance, even at Rome, it has never been able, except among the Jews, to emerge from its cramping chrysalis of magic, and become a really valuable stimulant of morality." Quoted from Dr. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People,* p. 292, by Skinner, ibid., p. 2.

[8] Skinner, op. cit., p. 8-10.

This message of the prophets was brought to bear with definiteness and precision upon concrete political and social problems. It was not an abstract principle which was declared, but a definite pronouncement in the name of the Lord upon an immediate, practical problem in their political and social life. These men were terribly sure what course their statesmen should take, what policies they should pursue. They told kings and princes what the Lord commanded them to do in the tangled political problems of the hour. The prophet told the people not only what God had done, but what He proposed to do, and bade them to act accordingly.

The inspiration of the prophets does contain a certain subconscious element. They do have visions. They see things. Yet, when the entire course of prophetic inspiration is reviewed, it becomes plain that not dream nor vision, but what we may call, for want of a better word, spiritual intuition, was the core of their experience.[9] The visions which the prophets record are not mere figures of speech, a literary form used to express ideas which they had received otherwise. They were actually experienced, just as John Bunyan's daydreams were an actual psychological fact. This being said, however, it must be insisted that these visions were not the ground of their certainty that they knew and were interpreting the Will of God. That certainty was founded on an immediate consciousness of having the mind of God. It was a consciousness which carried with it, within it, the absolute mark of its reality and authenticity. There is something which cannot be analyzed as it cannot be argued. All that can be said of it, is that it is. This is the innermost secret of the prophetic inspiration. The minds of the prophets were "in tune with the Infinite," and they knew it, and thus knew that what they said was not of themselves, but of God. Thus the prophet is one who speaks, and who knows that he speaks, the mind of God. They were immediately and powerfully conscious of the Divine influence upon themselves. They received an impulse to speak and they were told what to say. These impulses and excitements they ascribed to the spirit of God (see Joel 2:28, Isaiah 44:3, Micah 3:8). The hand of the Lord was laid on them. These phenomena, it is true, do exist in other religions. There also we find men who experience a certain mental elevation, who have ecstasies and dreams. But what exists in rudimentary forms elsewhere reaches its perfect state in the Old Testament prophets. Here it moves almost exclusively in high religious regions, and is directed to noble ethical ends. What they have to say about the Will of God, and about righteousness and ethical truth in general, commended themselves then, and commend themselves to-day as true and self-convincing.[10]

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[9] See Skinner, ibid., pp. 11, 220, 221.

The uniqueness of prophecy lay, then, in this direct communication of the Word and Will of God to these men; in the way in which their total personality became the instrument and mouthpiece of that spiritual truth which was given them to declare; and the direct application of that message to the history, the destiny, of the Hebrew people.

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[10] On this important subject see A. B. Bruce, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 144ff. Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, art., "Old Testament Prophecy." Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, pp. 1-17, 185-200, 220-222.

Prediction occupies a prominent and central position in Hebrew prophecy. For the Hebrew prophet was an historical continuation of the diviners in other religions, and of the seers in the early days of the religion of Israel. Hence prediction is no accidental part of the message of the later Hebrew prophets. These men considered it to be a part of their mission to announce beforehand what God was about to do. Always, however, this prediction has its origin in spiritual experience, and always it has an ethical purpose in view. The knowledge of what was about to happen was not gained otherwise than in direct spiritual communion with God. And that knowledge was used to instruct the people in righteousness in personal and national living. In displacing the diviner and magician who disclosed, for hire, the secrets of the future, the prophets continued to exercise their functions on a wholly religious basis. Prediction remained, but it was transformed. The souls of these men were very sensitive souls. "The prophet's mind is the seismograph of Providence, vibrating to the first faint tremors that herald the coming earthquake." Doubtless these men "sensed" things before they happened. Their spiritual vision enabled them to peer into the future as other men could not. As we shall see, Jeremiah predicted with extraordinary accuracy the political history of the people of Israel over a long period of time. Thus to deny that the prophets had such powers of prediction is to contradict alike the plain reading of their prophecies and the plain reading of history.

Similarly with regard to what is known as Messianic prophecy. The Messianic hope emerged at the time when the expectations of the people for the reëstablishment of the glories of the kingdom of David were doomed to disappointment. Then their eyes were fixed on the coming of a Messiah or Savior who should rescue their kingdom in glory and righteousness. The Messiah was thus always an historical figure, idealized by spiritual imagination. The word "Messiah" means "anointed." Thus he was usually thought of as a king, the Ideal King who was to reign in peace and prosperity. Without doubt, too much has been made of these Messianic prophecies, as if the prophets not only in outline, but in detail, foresaw and foretold the coming of Christ. It was not only natural but inevitable that after the coming of Christ, the New Testament writers should interpret much of this material as referring to Christ the Anointed. It is not necessary to assume that the Old Testament prophets had any definite foreknowledge of Christ as an historical personage. Yet on the other hand it ought to be admitted that in some dim and inarticulate way, they may have perceived the realization of their hopes in some Figure beyond the circumstances and conditions of their time. If we ought not to attempt to fit their descriptions of the Messiah to the details of the earthly life of Jesus, we ought also to give up the attempt to explain everything they said by its possible reference to some contemporary person or event. The truth about these Messianic prophecies lies somewhere between these two extremes. Just where, it will never be possible to say. Just where, it is not necessary that anyone should attempt or presume to say.

The prophets, then, were men who saw the nature of God, the rule of God, the will of God, and who told the people what they saw. Every prophet had this sense of speaking for God. The great word of Elijah was "Thus saith the Lord." When Isaiah described his commission, he said it was as if an angel had taken a live coal from the altar and had touched his mouth with it and said: "Lo! this hath touched thy lips. Go and tell the people." Jeremiah described his commission by saying that the Lord put forth his hand and touched his mouth and said, "Behold I have put my word into thy mouth." They were God-inspired, God-controlled men, raised up by God for the purpose of teaching a stiff-necked and reprobate people the truth concerning Himself. There never was a grander work done in all history before Christ than the work that was done by these Old Testament prophets. Whether one thinks of the nobility of the work itself, whether one thinks of the nobility of the men who did it, or whether one thinks of how the whole moral future of the world depended upon it, the work of the prophets looms up as one of the greatest moral achievements in all history. It was not easily done. These teachers of the Old Testament did not have a good time. They were not popular. They did not lead what are commonly called successful lives. They did not have bright pupils: the people were slow to learn and understand. They did not have obedient pupils. Rather they are repeatedly upbraided as reprobate and stiff-necked. But the prophets went on their way undaunted. They preached the truth without any compromise. They did not mind any stray things which might happen to themselves. They uttered the full oracles of God, without asking whether their sermons would be palatable and pleasing or not. They threw down the gauntlet to national prejudice, national patriotism and popular piety, and by so doing, they lifted the religion of Israel to lofty heights. They created ideas about God such as the world had never before possessed. They laid the spiritual foundations on which the Gospel of Christ was destined to rest.

Consider, then, what were the religious ideas of these great teachers of the Hebrew people, before they went into exile in the year 586 B. C. The message of all of these great preëxilic prophets rested upon these fundamental ideas: Jehovah alone is the God of all Israel. Between Him the the people of Israel there existed a fundamental pact or covenant which the people were not to violate. The covenant demanded the exclusive worship of Jehovah; a worship that should be founded in righteousness of life, which consisted in ethical and moral obedience. But this covenant the people had violated. They had violated it by persistently worshiping other gods. They had violated it by worshiping Jehovah in heathenish ways. They had violated it by living wicked and ungodly lives. Therefore God was sure to punish the people. And the only way His wrath could be turned aside, was not by offering more sacrifices, but only by turning to Him with all their hearts and worshiping Him in righteousness of life. One can take the whole line of the prophets from Amos down through Jeremiah, a period of one hundred and twenty-five years, and that was the burden of the message of everyone of them. See now to what heights in their preaching these prophets carried the Idea of God.

Gone for the prophets are the old childish ideas about God. They never once thought of Him as a kind of superman. They never described Him as walking on the tops of trees, or having whims and humors, or talking in human form with human beings. Read the ninth and the eleventh and seventeenth chapters of Isaiah. God is a moral Being. His attributes are Holiness, Justice, and Love. "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins." His Name henceforth is the Holy One of Israel.

Gone for the prophets is belief in the existence of other gods. For them, they are no gods at all. How could it be otherwise? If God be Righteousness, there could be but one God, for there cannot be more than one righteousness. If God be Justice, there cannot be more than one God, for how can there be more than one Justice? So before the moral vision of these great seers, the gods of other peoples faded into nothingness. They ceased to exist in the light of the moral splendor of God as they came to know Him and to declare Him. This idea came slowly, but it was bound to come. And the prophet Jeremiah has this distinction among others, that he was the first to declare in so many words that the gods of the heathen are not real beings but exist solely in the imaginations of their worshipers. "Can a man make gods himself," he asks, "that are no gods?" "Hath any nation changed their gods which are no gods?" [11] Jehovah is the fountain of living waters: the idols are cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. And unequivocal and impassioned is the exclamation at the end of the sixteenth chapter:

> "O Lord, my strength and my fortress and my refuge in the days of affliction, nations shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth and shall say: Surely our fathers inherited lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit."

[11] **Jeremiah 16:20, 2:11.**

The German poet Schiller has a pathetic poem entitled "The Passing of the Gods of Greece." Over the preaching of the prophets might be inscribed: "The passing of the gods of the earth."

Once more, for the prophets the worship of God was forever founded in the moral nature of God. No one can understand the message of the prophets who does not render account of the depth and grandeur of their conception of sin. And no one can measure the moral stature of the prophets who does not comprehend the immense nobility of their conception of sin. The world has witnessed nothing comparable to it. Let any one familiar, for example, with Greek thought and literature contrast—one cannot say compare—the absence of any thoroughgoing conception of sin amongst the Greeks with that conception of it which runs from beginning to the end of Hebrew prophecy. The world, outside of this little group of men, had no adequate conception of the meaning or of the consequences of sin. For the prophets, sin no longer consisted in failure to offer a sufficient quantity or quality of sacrifices. A man could no longer justify himself before God by the blood of rams or goats. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Sin has ceased to be a thing of ritual, and has become an offense against the righteousness of God. It is one of the noblest conceptions of Hebrew prophecy and one of the most fundamental, that human wrongdoing is an offense to a Moral God, an offense that is bound to bring swift and thorough punishment. Anyone who wishes to understand how the ideas of God in the Old Testament prepared for the idea of God in the New Testament must lay fast hold of this cardinal teaching of the prophets. Jesus' conception of sin as a fact and a factor in human experience which must be abolished before man can enter into fellowship and communion with God, is founded directly upon the moral teaching of the prophets. Paul's conception of sin which has influenced and shaped the whole course of Christian theology was drawn from the moral insight and the moral inspiration of Old Testament prophecy. One of the grandest elements in the teaching of these prophets was their conception of the permanent alienation of the human soul from God by the fact of its conscious wrongdoing. These prophets found no solution of this problem; but the fact is that they made a solution necessary and inevitable by their insistence upon its profound and permanent nature as an obstacle between the human soul and the knowledge of God and fellowship with God. Nothing in the way of sacrifice, or worship, or of lip-service can take the place of the abandonment of sin as a condition of obtaining the good-will of God. The prophets sometimes used harsh words about sin. And they used harsh words about the people, their infidelity and apostasy. They compared the people with harlots and adulterers. Finicky people find this language distasteful. It is not pretty and pleasant. They do not like to read these words. "Is it not shocking," they say, "to find such language in the Bible?" But the really terrible thing would be if one did not find it. The truly terrible thing is the easy-going way in which many people regard sin, whether in themselves or in others. The prophets made thorough work of it. In their healthy way they went to the bottom of the whole moral situation. And at the bottom, they laid the foundations for the Gospel of Redemption.

As we have seen, these Old Testament prophets did not care very much about what happened to themselves. Amos did not ask himself: "What will these revelers do to me?" And Jeremiah did not say: "I wonder what Jehoiakim will think of me." These were fearless men. They overlooked the prejudices, the fears, the popular ideas of the hour. Most men shrink from braving danger, exposing falsehood, fighting against wrong. They swim with the stream. They spread their sails to the veering wind. They look on success as the end of living, and popularity as the test of truth. Not so the prophets. Their vision pierced beyond the vain shows and the passing pageantries of life. King, priests, nobles, were but weak men. That which paraded as public opinion was to them but the shout of the noisiest. They believed that one with God was always a majority. They flung to the winds all false types of goodness. They would not deceive for reward or promotion, and they would not lie, because they spoke for God.

Such, in general, was the genius of Old Testament prophecy, and such men were the prophets. Into this picture we shall now proceed to fit the personality and the message of Jeremiah. We shall try to see wherein he was like the other prophets, and wherein he differed from them; in what respects his message coincided with what had been said and taught by those who had preceded him, and in what respects it took a new coloring, rose to new heights and developed Hebrew thought and feeling into the dimensions of a universal and spiritual religion.

# CHAPTER V

## THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Date, 627-628 B. C. Jeremiah 1.

In the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah we have the story of how he came to be a prophet. This was the result of a distinct "call" of God. The word of the Lord "came to him" (verses 2, 4). It is probable that this account of his call to be a prophet was dictated by Jeremiah himself. And it is probable that, recalled and reproduced twenty-three years later than the event itself, we have not a minutely accurate narrative of what took place at the time. It was doubtless colored somewhat by the prophet's subsequent experience. Yet the main thought and outline may be accepted as accurate and authentic.

In general, we discover both in the Old Testament and in the New, that the great workers for righteousness were men of God's own choosing. They did not choose themselves for the task, but they were chosen by God to do a work for him. The work of God, so far as the Bible is concerned, does not seem to have been done by a man getting up some morning and looking round the world and saying: "Here, perhaps, is work that needs to be done." Rather, God's work is done by men who are chosen by God to do it.[1] They were chosen for it in the face of their own protests, and in spite of their sense of personal unworthiness and unfitness for the task that was laid upon them. Yet they did it because they felt that God meant them to do it.

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[1] See Genesis 12:1; Exodus 3:10; Judges 6:12; I Samuel 3:11; I Samuel 16:12; I Kings 18:1.

If this is true of God's workers in general, it is supremely true of the prophets. Not one of them chose to be a prophet. Every one was chosen by God to be His spokesman.[2] And this sense of being chosen constituted his call. It is not necessary to explore the nature of this spiritual experience. In essence, it is not different from that which we find in biography outside of the Bible. It has been well described, for example, by Kipling, who puts the same idea in the mouth of Mulholland, who was sent back to the cattle-ship to preach His word:

> I didn't want to do it, for I knew what I should get;
> An' I wanted to preach religion handsome and out
> of the wet,
> But the word of the Lord was lain on me, an' I done
> what I was set.

Always it was an overwhelming sense of Divine commission and appointment; a sense of being set aside for a particular purpose, not one's own, but God's; a conviction that that purpose must be fulfilled; and the conviction that the one chosen is the agent of God by whom it shall be fulfilled. As Bishop Henson has written:

> The unique moral value of the Bible arises from the combination in one teaching of an intense belief in the sovereignty and righteousness of God, and an equally intense belief in the individual mission and worth of men. Let these two truths be combined in a single teaching, so that you not only believe that God will win His

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[2] See Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1:3; Amos 7:14, 15; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1, etc.

victory in the world, but also believe that God means to win through you, if you will consent that He should, then you have the faith which can remove the mountains of difficulty and overcome the world.

This sense of being called by God to be His spokesman is, of course, the secret of the indomitable moral courage of the prophets of the Old Testament as it is of all men who have anything like the same kind of experience. The prophets in the Bible and out of it lost all sight of their private personalities and of their personal fortunes. They so identify themselves with the will of God, and become exclusive of all else, His spokesmen, that they have but one ambition: faithfully to reproduce the message that it has been given to them to declare. Thus, John Knox declared: "I am in the place where it is demanded of my conscience that I speak the truth; and the truth I shall speak, impugn it who may." Evidently, opposition of any kind, suffering or persecution of any kind, is practically meaningless to one who operates under such a sense of moral destiny as that. Nothing can silence him, and nothing can stop him.

All that needs to be said of the Old Testament prophets in the way of distinguishing their experience from that of other men is that they had this "sense" of Divine appointment to a degree that has not been paralleled before or since. Take Amos for example; when he presented himself at Bethel, his listeners mocked him and ridiculed the rough burr of his speech and the cut of his homely garments, and told him he had better go back south to his sheep. And we remember his reply: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdsman, . . . and the Lord took me from following the flock and the

Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos 7:14-15). You cannot do anything with a man whose mission rests on such a moral basis. A man who does his work with such a sense of the Divine imperative behind him is going to see his work crowned with Divine success.

Jeremiah's call does not differ in essence from that of all the other prophets. It is distinguished only by extraordinary vividness and depth, and by the warm and passionate personal language in which it is described. The date, the year, in which this call came to him is remembered. He was then a young man, twenty-three years of age. The young king Josiah, who began to reign when he was a child, was not much older. At the time of his call, Jeremiah was at Anatoth, where he was born and reared. And some time that year the Word of the Lord was laid on him. And it kept being laid on him. "It came also in the days of Jehoiakim, [and] . . . unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive" (verse 3). Jeremiah was never without this witness. He had not much else. But he never lacked this sense of moral destiny. This accompanied him on his tragic career from beginning to end, and kept him from swerving from the path of his appointment.

> . . . the word dwells in Jeremiah as his abiding possession, the ebb and flow of inspiration has passed away, and his personality is no longer subject to the invasion and retreat of the prophetic ecstasy.[3]

So profound was Jeremiah's sense of being chosen for his work that, like Paul (Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 1:4), he felt that even before his birth he was ordained to be God's prophet (verse 5). It was thus doubtless that he afterward read back the story of his life. He could not have had this tremendous conviction at the beginning of his career. But in the midst of it, when this experience of his call to be a prophet was written, so deep was his feeling that God had predestined him for his career, that he carried his calling back before he came into being.

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[3] A. S. Peake, *Jeremiah,* Vol. I, p. 7.

In common with other prophets (Exodus 3:11, 4:1; Isaiah 6:5; Amos 7:14) Jeremiah has the sense of being inadequate to this great calling, and shrinks from his task (verses 7-9). He protests that he is too young. It is possible that the word "child" may also hold the meaning of "childlike." He is too sensitive, too delicate to undertake so terrible a mission. But whom the Lord raises up for His witnesses, He equips for their tasks. And never in all history was the pledge more faithfully kept: "To whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them." And from that hour Jeremiah went where he was sent, spoke what he was commanded to speak, and was not afraid.

Then there followed what to-day we should call an actual psychical experience: ". . . The Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth." The merit of this description of religious experience is its simplicity. Here are no cherubim or seraphim, as in the case of Isaiah. Here are no visions of chariots and wheels as in the case of Ezekiel. Here is direct contact between God and the soul of Jeremiah. Here is immediate and indubitable experience of God. Here is Reality of the most solid sort imaginable. And that Reality is the ground of Jeremiah's certainty. That certainty was built upon foundations so sure that the threats of Jehoiakim went for nothing. Scourgings, dungeons, starvation, execration, could not weaken, much less silence, the message he was there to deliver. Guided by this Reality as by a star in the heavens, he steered a straight course through the vacillations of Zedekiah, and the confused policies of a half century of political bewilderment; and though the whole fabric of Jewish nationality broke down over his devoted head, he was as sure at the tragical finish, as in the sunniest days of Josiah, that what he had uttered was the unaltered and unalterable Will of God. The most magnificent illustration of religious certainty to be found in human history, has for its only foundation the simplest story of personal and actual experience of God. But this experience of God was so direct, so immediate, so rich in its spiritual consequences not only for Jeremiah himself but for his people and thus for the world, that it can best be described as an outpouring of the life of God into the soul of His servant. Out from that rich and continuous experience of God were wrought new and revolutionary ideas of God, and of man, and of the relationship between God and His children. Religion was freed not only from all superstitious observance, but also from all reliance upon outward form. In a word, Jeremiah's experience of God became the foundation upon which a new and spiritual religion was to be built. The distinguishing characteristic of Jeremiah's whole contribution to religion, as we shall see, lies in his clear perception of religion as a personal relation between God and man. And it is in these terms that he understood and described his own call to be a prophet.

Much unnecessary discussion has been caused by the statement that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet "unto the nations" (verses 5, 10). It has been claimed that this was too wide, too ambitious a mission ever to have entered into the mind of Jeremiah at all. Such an objection simply illustrates the tendency to look for difficulty where none really exists. How could a man to-day prophesy about the policies or politics of England or of America without at the same time having something to say about France or Russia or China? And if the world is too small to-day to limit a prophetic utterance to the confines of a single land, it was much too small in the day of Jeremiah. As we have seen, the fate of that little nation was closely linked with that of the great empires which surrounded it, and Jeremiah could not open his mouth about the policies of Jehoiakim without interpreting those of Egypt and of Babylon as well.

It was a stupendous task. He was to be set over the nations. But so was St. Francis; so was Savonarola; so was Luther. It is the saints who judge the earth. It is moral and spiritual principles which determine the destiny of nations. The downfall of the ancient dogma of the Divine Right of Kings may be traced to Calvin's magnificent assertion of the sovereignty of God. And the birth of modern democracy has its source in the prophetic announcement of the sovereignty of the human soul. In the light of subsequent history what is here said of the august dignity of the appointment of Jeremiah is abundantly justified. He did pluck up and break down; he did destroy and overthrow. But by planting within the soul and conscience of the Jewish people a new conception of religion, he reared a mighty religious structure which has endured through all the vicissitudes of time.

We cannot be sure that the two visions which close the chapter occurred at the time of his call, but there is plenty of reason for believing that they did. The first, at least, is "admirably adapted for the mood of the prophet at the time of his call."[4] No reader either of the Bible or other literature will be troubled by the fact or the meaning of "vision" in general. There is no essential difference between the visions of the men and women in the Bible and in other spiritual biography. A vision is simply an immediate insight into the being, the purpose, the Will of God. It is the sense of immediacy which makes up the meaning of "vision." Instead of being a derived, a deducted, a reasoned conviction, it is an immediate, a given, a direct communication of Divine truth. All literature is full of authentic illustrations of this experience, and it is a too common, a too generally admitted experience to require either explanation or defense of its authenticity. To say that all such experience is purely psychological; to say that its sources lie in abnormal or pathological states of mind; to insist that here are simply subjective experiences which require no objective reality for their understanding, is simply to assert what the facts deny. When all of the mass of testimony as to the reality of these experiences is gathered together and examined, it may safely be affirmed that "the God-idea explains the facts, and alone serves to explain the facts well."[5]

The first of these visions of Jeremiah is characteristic of the prophet's nature and outlook upon life (verses 11-13). He sees the will and purpose of God in the branch of an almond tree, a very homely and commonplace object. One has only to think of the vision of Isaiah, and the grandiose and even grotesque visions of Ezekiel, to detect the naturalness and simplicity of this vision of Jeremiah. The sense of the Divine element in everyday things is one of the signs of the greatness of Jeremiah's soul. We must imagine that the prophet is walking in the fields, gone out to be alone and to brood over the problem of his nation's need, and of the call which has come to him to be a prophet to the people. The more he thinks, the more depressed and burdened he becomes. He has been called to a task from which his very soul shrinks, and he is overwhelmed with a sense of its futility and of his own inadequacy. He sees the moral corruption and the moral complacency of the people, and he feels the urge of God's spirit to call it back to paths of righteousness. The whole countryside in which he walks seems in strange harmony with his sad thoughts. It is in the grip of winter, bleak, barren, bare. All round him there is no sign of life. Everything everywhere is desolate and dead, just like the nation itself. Then, suddenly, he stops. He has lifted his eyes and caught sight of an almond tree bursting into bud and bloom. It was a sudden and startling reminder that in the midst of that wintry landscape, God was alive and God was at work. Only a single branch of blossom in a sheltered, sunny bank—but all the glory of spring, the beauty of summer, the golden wealth of the coming harvest is prophesied in that. And the promise and prophecy of the spiritual awakening of God's people, and the fulfillment of His Will for them, is given in the glimpse of the almond tree. God is awake, God is at work Who will turn the wilderness of His people's life into the glorious garden that is to be. And in the strength of that vision, Jeremiah went forth to obey God's call and to attempt, in coöperation with

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[4] A. S. Peake, ibid., Vol. 1, Introduction, pp. 8-9.

[5] See the author's *The Eloquence of Christian Experience,* pp. 43-47.

His omnipotent strength, what had seemed to him to be an impossible task.

It was a "fit prelude to the life-work of the prophet who first clearly conceived religion as a personal relation between man and God."[6] Here we see the nature with which God had endowed him, and the personal experience of religion in the earliest moments of his career. More than ancestry, more than home or environment, it was this which fitted him for his task. The Hebrew, as George Adam Smith points out,[7] for almond tree also means "watchfulness." "In that first token which a Palestine winter affords, the prophet received the sacrament of his call and the assurance that God was awake." Nature is a parable of God's working. God is about to break through the hard crust of the nation's life, and bring His own works into fruition.[8]

The second vision (verses 14-19) needs no extended comment after our survey of the political conditions of the time. "The North held the forces for the fulfilling of the Word." The ominous North was indeed like a boiling caldron. This seems the natural interpretation. Others say that Jerusalem is the caldron, with its inhabitants inside of it, and that the seething forces from the North are to cause it to boil.[9] At any rate, the trouble, the Divine trouble, is to come from the North. Scythians and Babylonians are to make it hot for the people of Jerusalem. We need not vex ourselves about the details. The intent of the vision is terribly clear.

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[6] A. S. Peake, ibid., Vol. 1, p. 5.

[7] George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah,* p. 84.

[8] Cf. Amos 8:1-2.

[9] Cf. Ezekiel 11:3; 24:3-14.

*Verse 15. Set every one his throne.* This does not refer to a siege. The city is thought of as already captured, and the victors set up their judgment seats, to punish the vanquished. *Verse 16.* Like Hosea, Jeremiah gives a religious reason for the Divine judgment against Judah. From the beginning to the end of his prophecy, Jeremiah denounces the faithlessness of the people in forsaking Jehovah to worship other gods.

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The contrast between these two visions, the one simple, the other terrible, illustrates at the very outset of Jeremiah's career [10] the tragic contrast in his own soul. On the one hand, he is a simple and sensitive lover of all beautiful things in which his poetical nature reads the love of God. On the other hand, his is the terrible mission of denouncing the religious apostasy of the people whom he loves, and prophesying that the mighty heathen nations of the North are to be the instruments of God to bring down upon the people the punishment which they justly deserve. "The story leaves the issue, not with one will only, but with two—God's and the man's whom God has called. . . . [Here] Jeremiah has pressed upon him at the start of his ministry the separateness, the awful responsibility, the power of the Single Soul." [11]

[10] "Again and again he was to experience the opposition between the natural impulses of the heart and the imperative mandate of the Divine Word. There are many poignant expressions in Jeremiah's later poems of that protracted inward agony and in these we shall find the key to the significance of his personality as the first great exponent of individual and universal religion." Skinner, op. cit. p. 34.

[11] George Adam Smith, ibid. pp. 87-88.

# CHAPTER VI

## EARLY PROPHECIES AT ANATOTH

Date 626-621 B. C. Jeremiah 2; 3; 4; 5:15-18; 6:1-8; 22-30

BEFORE beginning to discuss the prophecies of Jeremiah, a word must be said about their literary form. Here two things must be remembered: first, that these prophecies were not reduced to writing at all until years after they were first uttered; second, that then they were not written out carefully by Jeremiah himself, but were dictated to Baruch. Under these conditions, it is perhaps fair to say with a great student of the Old Testament that

> the literary style of Jeremiah can scarcely be spoken of, because, strictly speaking, we have no literature from him. . . . Even the dictated portions are mere outlines and skeletons. No doubt something of Jeremiah's literary manner will be reflected in these fragments . . . [but] the flowers of Jeremiah's diction and thought have reached us only after being cut and pressed; the bloom and fragrance yet remaining with these suggest faintly what they were when fresh.[1]

This "faint" suggestion, it may perhaps be added, is yet so vivid, spiritually so distinct, so appealing, that it permits us to imagine, without much difficulty what in its original form and utterance it must have been, in beauty and in power. There is an exquisite literary quality in Jeremiah's writings, a "haunting beauty,"[2] which justifies the assertion that he might have become the greatest lyrical poet of Israel.

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[1] Dr. A. B. Davidson, art., "Jeremiah," Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible.*

But it was not Jeremiah's ambition to be a poet. He cares, that is, much less for manner than for matter. Thus, he is not a stylist. He does not compose with the ease, the care, the literary regularity of other Old Testament prophets and poets. He has something tremendous to say. He says it; and he says it over and over again. The monotonousness and repetitiousness of which many readers of Jeremiah complain is, from a purely literary point of view, entirely justified. But Jeremiah does not care a great deal about the literary point of view. His voice rolls on with a message which involves the moral destiny of Judah and the whole race of men. It is with that alone that he is ultimately concerned. He is one of those preachers who care little about style as such. His utterances come from a spirit in tumult. Hence their expression is bound to be uneven. If they cannot be fitted into the requirements of style and scansion, so much the worse for scansion and style. Versifiers have a hard time trying to fit the dynamic utterances of this prophet of the spirit into the accepted rules of versification. In the strict sense of the term the man has no literary method. His object is to say what he has to say, and not the way in which he says it.

It will surprise no one at all acquainted with ancient literature or with early Bible literature, to discover that much of Jeremiah's preaching was done in poetical form. Poetry is the earliest of all literary forms. Folk songs and sagas, these are our earliest literary monuments. Poetry precedes prose as a vehicle for the expression of religious and national sentiment. The earliest bits of Old Testament literature are songs and odes, like the Song of Deborah and the Lament of David.[3] Other prophets before Jeremiah had used the poetical form for the expression of their ideas, and some of these poems are the high-water mark of Hebrew literature. It was natural, therefore, that Jeremiah should use the same form for the expression of his ideas. Moreover, as we have seen, Jeremiah was essentially poetical by nature. His was a sensitive soul, with spiritual insight and a spiritual interpretation alike of nature, the human soul, and the Divine will. His verse was thus that of the countryside in which he had been reared, touched by the exquisite feeling and delicate sensitiveness of his own nature. The images are all taken from rural life, just as Jeremiah knew it, all of which are simple, many of which are homely, some of which are ugly: a girl and her ornaments; a stunted desert-shrub; the incomparable olives; the vulture, the stork and the crane; the lion, the wolf and the spotted leopard; the potter and his wheel; the shepherd, the plowman; the vine-dresser; the candle in the home; the housemill and the wineskin; the yoke, the plow, the dung on the pastures; the instincts and tempers of breeding animals.

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[2] J. A. Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament,* p. 168.

Hence, many of the "prophecies" of Jeremiah were not sermons in the ordinary sense, because they were cast in the language of poetry. But this was poetry, it must be remembered, in the Hebrew sense of that term. In Hebrew poetry there are two principles involved. There is the principle of parallelism of meaning, and there is the principle of rhythm of sound. The first of these principles is found in all forms of human song, but it is an all but invariable element in Hebrew verse. The lines of a couplet, that is, may repeat the sense (parallelism that is synonymous), or it may add to the sense (supplementary), or it may carry the sense forward (progressive), or it may give the opposite sense (antithetic). In every case, however, the meanings correspond or respond to each other. Thus in 2:2:[4]

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[3] Judges 5; 2 Samuel 1:17-27.

I remember the troth of thy youth,
  Thy love as a bride,
Thy following Me through the desert,
  The land unsown,

we have a synonymous parallelism. And in 2:32:

Can a maiden forget her adorning,
  Or her girdle a bride?
Yet Me have my people forgotten,
  Days without number,

we have a supplementary parallelism. In 2:29, however:

What quarrel have you against Me?
  All you are the sinners;
Against Me you all have rebelled—
  Rede of the Lord,

we have a parallelism that is progressive; and 3:5, 19:

Bears He a grudge forever,
  Stands on His guard for aye?
But I have declared the How (?)
  I should set thee among the sons,
And should set thee a land of delight,
  Fairest domain of the nations,

we have an antithetical parallelism.

In addition, however, to the parallelism of meaning we have the rhythm of sound. Rhyme as a principle of versification is no part of Hebrew poetry at all. The formal element in Hebrew poetry is rhythm. This rhythm is achieved by balancing a certain number of time intervals with a certain other number of such intervals. And since Hebrew is an accentuating language, a line of Hebrew poetry as such always consists of two parts, balancing a certain number of stress accents by another number of such accents. In every line of Hebrew poetry, it is the second part which yields the completed sense of rhythm. The caesura is thus an essential part of Hebrew poetry. Sometimes both parts of a line will have the same number of stress-accents, and sometimes an unequal number of such accents (catalectic verse). In this case a certain number of accents is balanced with one less accent, and a pause at the end of the line. This form of meter is found in various parts of the Old Testament (Amos 5:2, Isaiah 5:1, 2, and especially in the first four chapters of Lamentations). It is the form commonly used in Jeremiah, and is specifically called the Quina rhythm. Jeremiah uses this Quina rhythm so often that at least one scholar (Duhm) has been inclined to reject as not belonging to Jeremiah not only all the prose in his book, but all the poetry not cast in this particular form. This idea may be dismissed at once as far-fetched and fantastical. For, because Jeremiah naturally used the poetical form, is no reason why he should not often have used prose as well. And because he habitually uses one form of rhythm is no reason why he may not sometimes have used others. The question what portions of the book belong to Jeremiah, and what portions do not, must be determined by historical tests and not by such arbitrary literary standards. We know, as well as we can know anything, that the prose Letter to the exiles in Babylon (chapter 29) was from Jeremiah. And we know also that it is often a vanishing line between irregular poetry and rhythmical prose. That Jeremiah used prose language, therefore, may be regarded as certain. He was a preacher "charged with truths heavier than could always be carried to the heart of his nation upon a single form of folk-song."[5] Not one of the older prophets but used both prose and verse. By his nature, by his gifts, as well as by his earliest associations, he was a poet to begin with, and in all probability more of the man that was in him comes out in the poetry than in the prose which he has left us. But the prose is there just the same as well as the poetry. They are the two component parts of the literature associated with his name.

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[4] These translations are from George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah*, published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York, pp. 91ff.

For five years after his call to be a prophet, Jeremiah remained at Anatoth. It was there that he began his work as a prophet. He began it after the manner of the prophets who had preceded him. He had studied the writings of Amos, of Isaiah, of Micah, and especially of Hosea, "by whom he was profoundly influenced and to whom he was bound by a deep, devotional kinship." For Hosea and Jeremiah may be called the two martyr prophets of Israel. Like the earlier prophets, Jeremiah was burdened with a sense of the deep moral guilt of the people, of the necessity of a thoroughgoing reformation if the destruction of the nation, which, as yet, Jeremiah describes only in vague terms, is to be averted. It is the old story of early loyalty to God; of the temptation to forget him and to worship the Baalim who were supposed to preside over the fertile soil; of the seductions of heathen practices and superstitions. Among such distractions,

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[5] See Bewer, ibid., p. 143.

Judah, as well as Israel, had forgotten her primary loyalty to God, had lost her innocence, and was embarked on a course that led straight to her doom. In other words, when Jeremiah began to prophesy, he began just where the older prophets had left off. In these earlier prophecies we find a fresh rehearsal of the old themes, uttered by a new voice, and in a new manner. For even in these earliest prophecies, the characteristic elements of that new conception of religion of which Jeremiah was the pioneer, flash out clearly against the dark background. The essence of these early prophecies, as of the message of the men who had preceded Jeremiah, was that the people had forgotten what God had done for them and were putting their trust in gods who were but the figments of man's perverted imagination (Jeremiah 2:11, 13). Jeremiah yields nothing to those who came before him in his passionate denunciation of the people's infidelity; his detestation of idolatry; and his insistence on the Righteousness of God and its exacting claims upon conscience. And God for Jeremiah, at even this early stage in his career, was not only Righteousness but Love, against which so persistently to have sinned was Judah's most heinous offense.

Two new factors in the historical situation seem to distinguish these prophecies of Jeremiah from those of the earlier prophets. For one thing, judgment had already been visited upon the Northern Kingdom. Nearly a century before Jeremiah began his work, Samaria had been captured and the existence of the Northern Kingdom had come to an end. That event could be held up before Judah as a warning; for the sin of Judah was even worse than that of Israel. For Jeremiah, however, the downfall of the sister kingdom meant more than this. His sensitive soul was filled with sorrow for the fate which had overtaken the sister nation. His heart goes out to the stricken and scattered tribes to which his own people were bound by age-long ties of ancestry and faith. Both of these ideas are woven into the fabric of these earliest messages of the prophet.

In addition, however, there was the terrible Scythian invasion of Western Asia which had taken place only a year or two before Jeremiah's call to be a prophet. These Scythians were a nomadic tribe which roamed over the general region between the Caucasus and the Caspian. Herodotus speaks of their cruelty as proverbial. From time to time they left their own territory and made swift and terrible invasions of other countries. They had no idea of founding a new empire, and they won their victories not because of their skill in warfare, but because of the terror which their sudden incursions produced, and their ruthless savagery. "They influenced political history chiefly by weakening the power of Assyria and thus preparing for its ultimate downfall.[6] About the year 630 B. C. they had invaded the territory of the Assyrians, and had brought confusion and disaster to an empire which threatened to collapse at any time. In addition, however, to this general situation, there doubtless reached the ears of Jeremiah the terrifying news that these Scythians were southern bound. They swept down the coast of Palestine as far as Egypt, and while they did not invade Judæa or threaten Jerusalem, they came near enough to cause terror to the people. No wonder, therefore, if it seemed to Jeremiah as it seemed to an older contemporary Zephaniah (1:14-2:1-15) as if this were a Day of Wrath, a judgment of God upon the earth. The invasion of the Scythians roused the soul of the prophet to see in the tumult of the nations the weapon of the Almighty for the punishment of His people.

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[6] **A. S. Peake, Introduction, p. 4.**

These early prophecies of Jeremiah are to be found in chapters 2-6. From what has already been said about the composition of the book of Jeremiah, we are prepared, even at the start, not to find straight reading. It is not certain that all of this material is by the hand of Jeremiah himself;[7] nor is it clear that all of this material that is Jeremiah's belongs to just this period in his career. Certain passages in chapters 5 and 6,[8] which belong to Jeremiah, may be assigned to the period of his early residence in Jerusalem, following the Reform of Josiah. "The Scythian terror seems to have passed, and men give themselves to their lawless pursuits with a feeling of security (5:1-3, 6:13) . . . They have learned to deride the prophecies of doom which once caused them to tremble" (5:13).[9] The prophet's tone has changed from that of warning of the approaching terror to that of stern condemnation of existing personal and social sins. Moreover, these passages betray an intimate knowledge of conditions in Jerusalem and indicate Jeremiah's distrust of the results of the Great Reformation on the religious life of the people.[10]

Thus to the early period belong, according to this arrangement of the material, all of chapter 2, most of chapter 3, all of chapter 4, and a small portion of chapters 5 and 6. It is impossible, of course, to determine the chronological order of these prophecies. Shall we say that the Scythian poems come first? There is a strong argument for this point of view. This terrible eruption may have been the external cause which impelled the prophet to come forth and prophesy. Or, it may be the other way. The order of the chapters may be chronological. Thus Jeremiah began his work as a result of his profound conviction that the corrupt political and social life of the people merited and would receive Divine condemnation. Then came the trumpet blast which reënforced his message and pointed its tragic moral. The reader may choose for himself. Chapter 2 may come first, or it may "belong mainly to the more tranquil period when the Scythian invasion was past." [11]

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[7] See discussion of chapter 3:6-18.

[8] Chapters 5:1-14; 19-31; 6:9-21.

[9] Skinner, op. cit., p. 143.

[10] Of course, these reasons are not conclusive. Anatoth was so near to Jerusalem that Jeremiah might easily, from so short a distance, know of conditions in the capital. And the references to the Reform are too vague to be decisive. One must choose. A reason for placing these passages in the later section is that they provide us with plausible material for a period in Jeremiah's ministry which otherwise would remain a blank.

All of these early prophecies are in poetical form, except for a "portage" of prose in 3:6-12. To the material in chapters 2-6 may be added a short prophecy in chapter 31:1-6 which doubtless belongs to this early period.[12]

### I. *The Call to Repentance and Promise of Restoration. Chapters 2; 3; 4:1-4.*

1. Chapter 2. A careful reading of these passages will reveal many of the fundamental ideas of Jeremiah's message, ideas that are broadened and deepened in his later work. It must be remembered that the prophet was a mature man when he began to preach. Like Jesus, he was thirty years old. Years of observation and reflection had preceded his spoken message. His convictions had had time to develop.

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[11] See Skinner, ibid., pp. 55-56. The usual order is retained here.

[12] Many scholars also assign to this period, chapter 31:15-22, one of the most touching of Jeremiah's prophecies. It seems best, however, for reasons which are given in chapter XVIII of this book, to place it at the very end of Jeremiah's career.

When he began to speak, his ideas had become clear. His later experience only seemed to confirm them. Thus in these first prophecies we discover his moral indignation against personal and social sin; the depth and tenderness of his love for his land and people; his conviction of the doom awaiting an unrepentant nation; his promise in the Lord's name of the salvation that has been prepared for those who love Him.

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*Verse 2. Kindness of thy youth.* When Israel was in its youth, it had loved God, and for this God continues to remember Israel. The word "kindness" means loving-kindness and is also used of God's love for Israel. *Verse 3. First-fruits.* See Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 26:2-11. The idea is that Israel was God's chosen people, consecrated to His service. *Verse 6. Vanity.* The word literally means breath, hence nothingness. The heathen gods have no existence. *Verse 7. Heritage.* The word which usually refers to the people, here means Palestine. *Verse 8. Handle the law.* The phrase suggests a collected set of regulations used by the priests. *Things that do not profit,* i.e. idols. *Verses 10-11.* Kittim refers to Cyprus. Even the heathen do not exchange one non-existing god for another. What abysmal folly, therefore, for Judah to exchange her God for useless idols! *Verse 13.* One of Jeremiah's very effective metaphors. *Verses 14-17,* which interrupt the sense, are doubtless an insertion by the compiler of a saying of Jeremiah which belongs elsewhere. Verse 18 follows admirably after verse 13. *Verse 16. Noph and Tahpanhes.* Memphis and Daphne. Egypt is meant. *Verse 18.* Having forsaken the fountains of living waters, the people turn to the Nile (Shihor). In other words, they seek political aid from Egypt. *Verse 20* should read *thou hast broken.* From long ago, Israel had thrown off all restraint. *Verse 22.* Cf. Lady Macbeth's lament that nothing will remove the bloodstains on her hands. *Verse 23.* The people contend that to worship Jehovah with heathenish rites does not mean that they have forsaken Him. Jeremiah declares, on the contrary, that their headlong plunge into heathenism is to be compared to run-away animals. Just so Judah runs after her lovers, the false gods. *Verse 25.* "Do not run the shoes off your feet." But the people have lost all self-control. *Verse 33.* Thou hast accustomed thyself to evil things. *Verse 34.* A difficult and possibly a corrupt verse. You do not have the excuse of saying you have slain thieves breaking into your houses, but your hands are stained with the blood of the innocent. *Verse 37.* This describes a sign of deep shame.

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2. Chapters 3 and 4:1-4. This section requires some rearrangement. After 3:1-5 will follow 3:19-25 and 4:1. These passages thus arranged make clear reading. After the denunciation of Judah for her sins (verses 1-5), there occurs (verse 19) the expression of a Divine hope that through repentance Judah may yet be treated as a son, and receive the inheritance. The passage which follows (through 4:1-4) illustrates the heartbreaking desire of Jeremiah for the repentance and salvation of the people. This strain runs all through the book, and makes up its pathos and tragedy. Nothing can stop the fury of God if the people continue in their sin. In addition to this prophecy, there is another in 3:6-18. It is plainly out of place, since it interrupts what precedes and follows.

It was apparently inserted here because of the general similarity of its theme with verse 5. Jeremiah, at this early period of his ministry, fervently hopes that through repentance Judah may not suffer the fate which has overtaken the Northern Kingdom. But, if this comes to pass, the privilege of forgiveness and restoration must be offered to the Northern Kingdom also, since Judah's sin was worse than hers. The thought is thoroughly characteristic of Jeremiah.

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(1) Chapter 3:1-5, 19-25; 4:1. *Chapter 3, verse 2, Bare heights.* A favorite expression of Jeremiah, denoting denuded hilltops, places of worship. *Verses 4-5. Wilt thou not.* This is a mistranslation. The sense is, Will you try to wheedle God as a faithless wife does her husband? *Verse 19.* This verse as we have seen should be read directly after verse 5. The meaning is obscured by the translation. The margin of the Revised Version gives the sense. It is not a question, but the expression of a deep desire. Israel is the daughter of Jehovah; but He would treat her like a son and give her an inheritance. *Hosts:* this word is really the plural of the word meaning "beauty," and a literal translation would be "heritage of the beauties of the nations."[13]

*Verse 20.* Israel here is the general name of the nation as a whole and practically refers to Judah which after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, alone represents the nation. *Verse 21. Bare heights,* not in exile, but in Palestine. The scene of Israel's idolatry is also the place of her penitence. *Verse 22;* cf. Hosea 14:4. *Verse 23. "Truly in vain is the sound from the hills, the tumult from the mountains,"* i.e. the wild nature-

[13] See Ezekiel 20:6, 15; Daniel 11:16, 41.

worship could never bring peace and prosperity. *Verse 24.* The reference is to the days of Manasseh, when not animals only but sons and daughters were sacrificed. *Chapter 4:1-4.* This is Jehovah's reply to the heartbroken confession of the people. *Verse 1. Abominations:* the word includes the whole detestable idolatrous worship of Judah. *Out of my sight,* lit. from before me; these words should be connected with what follows, "Thou shalt not wander away from before me." *Verse 4.* This doctrine of an inward circumcision points the way to the epoch-making doctrine of the new covenant (31:31-34) in which Jeremiah most nearly approximates the New Testament teaching.

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(2) Chapter 3:6-18. It has been argued that this passage (with the possible exception of verses 12, 13b, 16) does not belong to Jeremiah since a distinction is made between the Northern and Southern Kingdom which is not according to the mind of the prophet. The passage is doubtless out of place and it is probable that verses 14, 15, 17 and 18 belong to a later editor. It is difficult to believe that Jeremiah expected a small remnant of the Northern tribes to come and settle in Jerusalem, and it is questionable if he anticipated that all the nations of the earth were to be gathered at Jerusalem to worship Jehovah. There is no reason, however, for not accepting the rest of the passage as genuine, belonging to some period in the reign of Josiah. What is more natural than that Judah should be thought of as guiltier than Israel if she failed to profit from her example?

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*Verses 6-8.* The idea is that Judah has not profited by the experience of the Northern Kingdom, and is therefore more guilty. *Verse 8. I saw* should read *she saw. Verse 9. Lightness,* i.e. her light-hearted faithlessness. *Verse 10.* Apparently a reference to the Deuteronomic Reformation. *Verse 11.* Judah might have profited from the example of her sister nation. *Verse 16.* A characteristic saying of Jeremiah. In a personal and spiritual religion, an outer ark guaranteeing the presence of God will be obsolete.

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### II. *The Scythian Songs. Chapters 4:5-31, 5:15-19, 6:1-8; 22-30.*

With the beginning of the fifth verse of chapter 4, there enters a new and startling element in these early prophecies of Jeremiah. The reader needs to remark it with special care, for it continues to be an increasingly important part of the prophet's message to his people. Until we come to this verse the prophet has indeed foretold the sure and swift punishment that will be visited upon the people unless they repent, but he does not indicate from what quarter or in what way that punishment is to come. But in the section we are about to traverse, the prophet sees it coming. And for the rest of his life he saw it coming. In his vision of the boiling caldron (1:14-16), he saw things seething. Soon after they began to boil over. And from then on, Jeremiah had his impassioned gaze fastened upon the North. When, in narrating his call, Jeremiah wrote that the Lord had said unto him, "Out of the North shall evil come upon the land," he doubtless read his subsequent experience into the Lord's commission of him to be His prophet. Yet from the very first, he scented the direction from which the wrath of the Lord was to come. And these early political intimations developed into settled and overmastering spiritual convictions. They determined the whole course of his moral career, and they shaped the whole tone of his message. This idea, that the nations of the North were to be the agents of God for the punishment of His people, caused Jeremiah to come into open conflict with every grade of opinion in Jerusalem, and lifted him to the heights of spiritual isolation and moral heroism. The section to which we have arrived thus has its great importance as the first announcement of an Idea which henceforth was to possess and control the soul of the prophet and to determine his human and spiritual career.

There comes, therefore, a break between verses 4 and 5 in chapter 4, the rest of which is a description of the terrors of the invasion and its moral meaning for Judah. In addition to this section, we have also the sections 5:15-18, 6:1-9, 6:22-26. These passages are all written in verse, and they describe in graphic language "the consternation and flight of the people, the arrival of messengers in hot haste from the North, the crowding of the rural population into fortified towns, the cutting off of stragglers in the open country, the meditated assault on the capital."[14] The main theme is throughout the same: the wickedness of the people has called down upon them the punishment of God from which it is useless for them to attempt to escape.

It is evident that Jeremiah was mistaken in his prediction that this particular invasion from the North was to bring disaster and punishment to the people of Jerusalem, for the Scythians retreated without harming the country, and years of peace and prosperity followed during the rest of Josiah's reign. But in his main conviction that from the North evil would come, Jeremiah was right. And it is really a matter of detail that the Babylonians and not the Scythians were to be the actual agents of the wrath of God. What influence this partial and preliminary failure of his prophecy had upon the fortunes of Jeremiah, we shall see later.

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[14] Skinner, op. cit., p. 44.

Nowhere does the poetry of Jeremiah rise to purer lyrical heights than in these passages, describing the terrors of the Scythian invasion. Here is no direct word of the Lord to the prophet, but here are the utterances of his own sensitive soul, "the artistic utterance of personal emotion." And through them all there breathes that infinite tenderness, that identification of himself with the sufferings of the people which is one of the outstanding characteristics of the soul of the prophet. In chapter 4:19-22, for example, the prophet "melts into the people." In all their afflictions, he was afflicted. Never does the prophet in all of his career stand outside and above the people only. No sooner has he done this, than, with something akin to a heartbreak, he puts himself within their experience and shares the consequences of their sin. This human and spiritual quality in Jeremiah makes him nearest of spiritual kin of all the Old Testament prophets to the Jesus of the Gospels who at one moment pronounces His withering woes upon the Pharisees, and at the next, is found weeping over Jerusalem.

Thus, both from a practical and from a spiritual point of view, these poems are an early revelation of the genius of Jeremiah. They show the great depth of his emotional life; his capacity for moral indignation; his unerring estimate of the claims of the Divine Righteousness; his infinite sorrow for the fate of the people; and his ability to express all of these spiritual ideas in a poetical language of great lyrical force and feeling.

We may divide these chapters into the following sections:

(1) 4:5-10. A general Proclamation, warning the people to take refuge in fortified cities. In *verse 10,* we have one of the sudden protests to God, which are to be found throughout the prophecies of Jeremiah.[15]

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(2) 4:11-22. *Verse 11-12.* The hot sirocco from the desert will be so violent that instead of winnowing the grain from the chaff, it will carry both away together. *Verse 12.* Omit the words *shall come for me* and translate "*a wind too strong for this.*" *Verse 16. Watchers.* By the change of a single consonant the reading would be leopards, which is far more intelligible. *Verses 19-22.* A cry of pain from the sympathetic heart of the prophet who cannot bear the thought of the ruin of the people. "This is one of the earliest instances of Jeremiah's bearing of the sins of the people and of their punishment." [16]

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(3) 4:23-28. "One of the finest, most powerful descriptions in the prophetic literature" (Peake).

I looked to the earth, and lo, chaos,
  To the heavens, their light was gone,
I looked to the mountains, they quivered,
  The hills were all shuddering.

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[15] See chapter XII, pp. 202, 203.
[16] George Adam Smith, op. cit., p. 113.

I looked, and behold not a man,
All the birds of the heavens had fled.
I looked for the gardens, lo desert,
All the townships were burning.[17]

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*Verse 27. "Yet will I not make a full end.* These words are doubtless a later insertion to lessen the terror of the judgment, or to show from later history that a remnant was spared.

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(4) 4:29-31. This is a continuation, without introduction, of the Third Song. There is to be found the same vivid description of the invasion, and keen irony in the question in verse 30. The word "lovers" in this verse does not suit the Scythians, but rather the later Babylonians with whom Judah made alliances. Therefore this verse may belong to the revision of the prophecy in 605 B.C.

(5) 5:15-18. This section reads as if the prophet had the exile in view. The allusion to their coming from afar, to the strangeness of their tongue, and to their antiquity, suits the Babylonians, and some, therefore, assign this section to a much later date. But the reference is probably to the Scythians, whom Jeremiah doubtless regarded as a primitive people. It is probable that verse 18 was inserted by a later hand (cf. 4:27).

(6) 6:1-9. In this poem, Jerusalem seems to be threatened, and the foes are described as preparing to attack her. Therefore the people of Benjamin who had taken refuge in Jerusalem are warned to leave it and flee to the South. It is possible that verses 6-9,

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[17] Translation George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah,* p. 61. Published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York.

which describe a siege, do not belong to the original poem, since the Scythians were marauders and did not lay siege. In this case, these verses will, like 5:19-31, be part of a later prophecy relating to the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. The moral theme of these poems is the same throughout, and repeats the message of the earlier prophets.[18]

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*Verse 1. And blow . . . Beth-haccherem.* These words may be an insertion. Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, was the home of Amos. Beth-haccherem may be a mountain three miles northeast of Tekoa. *Verse 3.* The enemy is represented as foreign shepherds who with their flocks come to graze off the country about Jerusalem. *Verse 4. Prepare,* lit.=sanctify. It was to be a "Holy War" to be initiated by sacrifices. The enemy are vividly described as talking to each other. *Verse 9.* The captivity of the Northern tribes was the first gleaning of the vines. Now there is to be a final and thorough gleaning resulting in the captivity of Judah also.

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(7) Chapter 6:22-30. The Seventh Scythian Poem. This poem describes once more the terror produced by the news of the impending invasion, and the ruthlessness of the invaders (cf. chapter 5:15-17).

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*Verse 23. As a man,* not "as one man," but "as a man of war." *Verse 24.* The people of Jerusalem express the sinking of heart with which they view the approach of the enemy. *Verse 25. Terror on every*

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[18] See Amos 9:1-10; Hosea 8:1-14; Micah 6:9-16.

*side* (cf. Job 18:11; Psalm 41:13). This is a favorite expression of Jeremiah, see 20:10, 46:5, 49:24. *Verse 26.* The death of an only son, for the Hebrew, was the worst possible bereavement. *Verse 27.* For the word *tower,* read "trier" or "assayer" and eliminate the word *fortress* which is probably a mistaken insertion. The verse means that Jehovah has made Jeremiah to be an assessor of the people's morals. *Verses 28-29.* The text is not wholly clear, but the general sense is plain enough. Ezekiel 22:18-22 should be compared with verse 28 (cf. Isaiah 1:25). Possibly the words *brass and iron* in this verse are a later insertion from the passage in Ezekiel.

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Thus ends the series of Scythian poems. They have shown us the earliest work of Jeremiah, and they have revealed elements of personal character and of religious conviction which continue to develop throughout the prophet's whole spiritual career.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE GREAT REFORM

Date, 621 B. C. Chapters 11:18, 11:18-23, 12:1-6.

In the year 621 B.C., when Josiah had been king for eighteen years, there occurred an event of the profoundest significance for the future of Jewish religion. In that year there was found in the Temple, where repairs were being made, a Book of Laws. The story of this is told for us in full in 2 Kings 22:3-23:24. When Hilkiah the priest brought the Book to Josiah, the king read it, and then made a solemn covenant that he would carry out all of the laws in the Book, and cause the religion of the people to correspond to its precepts. Hence the Great Reformation, which marks an important epoch in the development of Old Testament religion.

Concerning this Book of Laws, three points may be considered as settled.[1] First, that this Law book is preserved in substance in the Book of Deuteronomy; second, that it furnished the basis of Josiah's radical Reform; third, that Jeremiah had nothing to do either with its composition or its discovery. No definite answer to the question who wrote it, or how it came to be hidden in the Temple, can be given. It has been suggested that the whole thing was in the nature of a pious fraud. The Book was written by members of the prophetic party who desired to have these reforms carried out. They then purposely hid the Book in the Temple, so as to give it added authority, and when they felt the time to be ripe, announced its "discovery" to Josiah. There is nothing intrinsically improbable in such an account of its origin, and the literary ethics of the time would not have disapproved of such a transaction. A very plausible alternative, however, to such a theory has been outlined by Dr. Skinner. The Book may well originate from the days of King Hezekiah, who also instituted a reform not only prohibiting idolatry, but seeking to centralize the national worship by destroying the local sanctuaries around which heathen practices were likely to gather (Micah 5:12-14; Isaiah 1:29, 2:20, 2 Kings 18:4, 22). It is possible that Hezekiah's reforming party reduced the principles of their reform to writing, and that this document was actually concealed in the Temple for safekeeping, and was not found until the repairs on the Temple were made during the reign of Josiah.

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[1] See Skinner, op. cit., pp. 91-93.

However this may be, the Book of Laws, as found, contained the nucleus of our present book of Deuteronomy, to which later additions were doubtless made. Thus Deuteronomy may fairly be described as a fresh codification of the ancient laws of Israel in the spirit of the prophets of the eighth century B. C. In it are found three cardinal principles: one is theological, another is liturgical, the third is ethical. The combination of these makes up the Book of the Laws.

Theologically, the Book lays down the doctrine of the one true and only God. The worship of all other gods is forbidden as well as all forms of witchery and necromancy. Liturgically, all worship of Jehovah is to be at Jerusalem only, and all local sanctuaries must be abandoned and destroyed. In explanation of this drastic policy, it needs to be remembered that the local sanctuaries were at this time hotbeds of heathenish, immoral and superstitious rites and forms of worship. If faith in the one God, and a pure worship of that God were to be preserved and perpetuated, these community shrines must be obliterated, and worship concentrated and centralized at Jerusalem. Ethically, this Book insists on justice as between man and man; man and woman; between master and slave; toward the debtor and the stranger. Yet the Book which insists on these stringent ethical precepts contains no word of charity for any other people save Israel, and no hint of any life beyond the grave.

Such, in general outline, was the Book of the Laws on which Josiah based his great Reform. One can imagine the consternation of the people, and especially of the local priests, when the agents of the king actually arrived at the local sanctuaries and ordered them to be destroyed. At one stroke, the people were deprived of their familiar places of worship, and the priests of their living. Yet something like this must actually have taken place in the year 621 B.C. in every community in the Southern Kingdom. Never was a drastic reform more thoroughly undertaken. And it is easy to see that while for a time it might have an outward success, it could not fail to breed resentment and hostility in the hearts of populace and priests alike.

What now was the relation of Jeremiah to this great Reform which took place after he had begun to prophesy, when he was in the early stages of his public ministry? The effort to connect Jeremiah with the composition or discovery of the Book and its introduction to Josiah may be ignored. There is no evidence that he had anything to do with it. In all probability he was still living at Anatoth. While his preaching and his tremendous indictment of the people and his predictions of coming disaster must have produced some impression, there is nothing to indicate that down to this time he had more than a local reputation. It is not improbable also that the failure of his predictions that the Scythians would humble and punish Judah reacted unfavorably upon him. He may himself have felt that he had been discredited, and have suffered from spiritual humiliation and bewilderment. It may have seemed to his sensitive soul that God had deserted him. From all of this, it is an easy inference that after the prophecies about the Scythians, Jeremiah for some years had remained silent. He was a prophet in obscurity. Hence, if Jeremiah was not consulted about the Book of the Laws and about the Reform of King Josiah that was based on the Book, it was, as Dr. Skinner says, "because no one thought of him as a person to be consulted."

But if he was not consulted, it requires no imagination to make us certain that he was interested. Five years had now elapsed since his call. There had been the intense personal experience of the call itself; there had been the vivid awareness of an approaching doom to the people for their sins in the sudden dramatic invasion of the Scythians. And now once more his sensitive soul, which had sunk into the depths of spiritual discouragement, was awakened by the tremendous news of the discovery of the Book of the Laws, and of the Reform behind which Josiah had put the full strength of his authority.

The student who has thus far carefully followed the course of Jeremiah's thought, and has noted his conception of religion even from the first as a personal and spiritual relationship between the individual soul and God, will have no difficulty in reconstructing Jeremiah's whole attitude toward the subject of the Great Reform. Indeed, if the thoughtful reader were left to himself and were asked, "What in your opinion would Jeremiah's attitude be?" he would probably answer as follows: At the beginning Jeremiah could not have failed to be impressed, and he must have leaped whole-heartedly to the support of a movement which promised the abolition of the idolatries which he abominated, and the prohibition of the immoralities which he hated. His whole nature must have been aroused at this unexpected answer to his prayers and longings for a purified worship and a morally cleansed people. But this, for Jeremiah, could not have been the whole story. For him, it may have begun, but it could not have ended there. When the first enthusiasm had worn off; when it became apparent that for the people religion was now slowly becoming a matter of external form: if they kept the written precepts of the new Law Book, and failed not to worship in the Temple at Jerusalem at certain intervals, then all was well between them and God; then Jeremiah's approval and support must have turned to distrust and aversion. A true prophet of the spirit, like Jeremiah, never could be permanently attracted by, never could have permanent faith in, a movement which, after all, relied upon external methods for the achievement of a spiritual religion.

Such would be our forecast of Jeremiah's contrasted attitudes toward the Reform, based upon what we have already learned of the man, with his passionate hatred of evil upon the one hand, his spiritual conception of religion upon the other. Precisely such we now discover Jeremiah's actual relation to Josiah's Reform to have been. It was not a consistent attitude. It was not the same at the end as it was at the beginning. It is often amusing to discover what unnecessary difficulties scholars create for themselves. Here is an instance of it. Discovering in Jeremiah's utterances two opposite opinions about the Great Reform, they have hastened to range themselves on the one side or on the other. Either Jeremiah must be a legalist, and a stout advocate from the beginning of his career to the end of it of the Book of the Laws and the system which it contained; or, he could have had from the beginning no sympathy whatsoever with that system, which he must have despised and rejected. In the former case, one whole section of the reported utterances of Jeremiah about Deuteronomy must be spurious; in the latter case, another. As a matter of fact, Jeremiah was neither a legalist on the one hand, nor was he without sympathy for the attempted Reform on the other; and both contrasted sets of utterances about the Reform belong to him at different periods of his career. Why not allow for the tides of the spirit, for the ebb and flow of spiritual emotion; for change of attitude; for the swift reconstruction of thought and feeling in the profound and tumultuous depths of this man's soul? Not only there are no difficulties in this change in Jeremiah's attitude; there would be insuperable difficulty in imagining anything else.

It is characteristic of the topsy-turvy arrangement of Jeremiah's prophecies, that his earlier attitude toward the Deuteronomic Reform should be described in his Book after his later attitude. Therefore the sequence of the chapters devoted to this subject needs to be inverted. Jeremiah's first response to the Reform of Josiah is described in chapters 11:1-8, 11:18-12:6. His subsequent position is outlined in chapters 7 and 8. We discuss here the earlier section only, reserving the later section for its proper chronological setting.

Jeremiah, then, was living in comparative obscurity in Anatoth, when

> the tidings of what had transpired in Jerusalem came upon him, as upon his neighbours, like a thunder-clap. . . . This was the biggest effort that had ever been made to bring the life of Israel into conformity with the will of God.[2]

It could not have left him unmoved. His first instinctive motion must have been to spring to its support. The fires of his soul, which had been burning low, flamed up once more. And the passion which now possessed him is given full expression in the eleventh chapter of his Book. Not only does he pronounce a curse on the one who refuses to hear and to obey "the words of this covenant," but he receives a commission (11:6) to go on a preaching mission "in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem" in support of the new Reform. Some have found this idea "most improbable"; but it is difficult to see what the grounds are for this "improbability." Granted that Jeremiah had now grown into a full-orbed consciousness of his prophetic mission; and granted that his whole soul was at first startled, and his enthusiasm roused at the thought of this grand attempt to obliterate at a stroke the moral and religious evils which had burdened his heart and to reinstate in its august simplicity the worship of Jehovah—and a summons to go forth in its support and to champion its cause does not seem "improbable" at all. On the contrary, it is just what we should expect.

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[2] Skinner, op. cit., p. 96.

This, then, we may consider the occasion of Jeremiah's emergence from the obscurity of Anatoth. No longer is he merely a community prophet. From now on he begins to loom as a national figure. From now on also he begins to taste the bitterness of unpopularity, of misunderstanding, of loneliness, of persecution to which henceforth for the rest of his life he was destined never to be a stranger. We have already spoken of the natural resentment felt not only by the populace but especially by the priests in the wholesale abandonment and destruction of the local shrines. This feeling would be particularly intense at Anatoth. For generations there had been a traditional rivalry between the priests of Anatoth, who considered themselves descendants of the house of Eli, the custodians of the Ark at Shiloh, and the priests of the house of Zadok, which, since the days of Solomon, had held the priesthood at the Temple. The royal order abolishing the shrine at Anatoth meant the transference of all authority and dignity from the priesthood at Anatoth to that at Jerusalem. Thus local pride was offended, and the local priests were humiliated. At such a time Jeremiah, their fellow-townsman, springs forward as an ardent champion of the new Reform. Disregarding its effects upon the dignity of the town and its priests, he goes about everywhere advocating the Reform and doing his best to put it into immediate and rigorous effect. Naturally the men of Anatoth regarded him with suspicion and animosity. From this time to the end of his life, Jeremiah was pursued by the vindictive hatred of his own people. We have the first description of this given us in chapter

11:18-23. We shall hear more of it later on in his life.

1. Chapter 11:1-8. The whole of chapter 11 does not refer to Jeremiah's first response to the Reform of Josiah. The section from verse 9 to verse 18 interrupts the sense. Verses 9-18 really transport us to another situation altogether. They belong to a later period after the death of Josiah when the Reform had begun to break down. We therefore omit this section of the chapter from the present discussion.

In the first eight verses of this chapter, however, we have an account of the effect upon Jeremiah of the reform movement. A word came to him from the Lord bidding him to become the advocate of the new Code. He was to support it with all his strength, and he was to go up and down among the people pronouncing a solemn curse upon them if they refused to accept it, and the pledge of God's favor and blessing was to be announced as the reward of their obedience to it. "Then answered I, and said, Amen, O Lord" (verse 5).

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*Verse 2. Hear ye.* The singular should be substituted: Hear thou. *Verse 4.* For this metaphor, cf. Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Isaiah 48:10. *Do them:* the pronoun *them* has no antecedent and should be omitted: "do according," etc.

look up

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2. Chapter 11:18-23. We must allow for a considerable interval of time between verses 8 and 18. During this period Jeremiah had been faithfully performing his preaching mission in behalf of the Reform.

Then he became aware that his work had aroused hostility. This hostility had grown in strength and bitterness until it had culminated in plots against his life. "And the Lord gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it" (verse 18). He was made aware of their doings. He was like a lamb led to the slaughter. Often Jeremiah had watched the lambs as they went to their fate, and had been touched by the pathos of it.[3] For its pathos consists just in this, that its trust betrays it to its ruin. It follows its owner all unsuspicious of harm and "licks the hand just raised to shed its blood." Just so Jeremiah, all unconscious of evil, had become the victim of secret plots against his life, for no one would have dared openly to attack an advocate of the king's reformation. The simile of the lamb is used in Isaiah 53:7, with a different emphasis and application.

In Jeremiah's appeal to God in the face of the opposition and persecution of his townsmen (verses 20-23) we have a characteristic outburst from Jeremiah. We shall find many such outbursts as we proceed. We completely misjudge the character of Jeremiah if we imagine him to be incapable of personal wrath and indignation. For the most part, his anger is impersonal and is directed against the evils of the people. But at times his utterances seem to us to be unnecessarily harsh and vindictive, and strangely out of keeping with the prophet who most nearly approaches the Christian ideal. The real way to meet this difficulty is to admit it. Jeremiah is in many respects a spiritual contradiction. Therein lies one aspect of the tragedy of his spiritual career. He is capable at one time of the most tender, haunting and heartbreaking utterances that ever issued from the human soul, and again of what read like sheer downright words of

[3] A. S. Peake, Vol. 1, p. 182.

hatred and vengeance. Psychologically, pathologically, if you will, this is not difficult to understand. Natures capable of the deepest emotion, experience that emotion in both of its extremes. The most exquisite tenderness is matched by the sharpest irascibility. It was so with Jeremiah. He must have been an uncomfortable man, from a popular point of view, to have around. He must often have appeared narrow, morose and even vindictive. We have a hint of this here. Yet it will not do to exaggerate this point of view. Jeremiah is really appealing for justification to the God who knows that his cause is right. And it is only fair to add that the words translated "let me see" (verse 20) are rendered "I shall see" by recent scholars. Thus this appeal of Jeremiah closely parallels the classic appeal of Job when he was misunderstood by his friends (Job 19:25-27).

3. Chapter 12:1-6. In this passage we have a meditation of Jeremiah on the spiritual meaning of the episode which has just been described. It is the first of a long list of what have been called the "Confessions" of Jeremiah,[4] a kind of inward and spiritual diary. In these "Confessions" he debates with himself, and even with God, the apparent contradictions between the justice and love of God upon the one hand, and the events of life as he knows them on the other hand. This unique feature of Jeremiah's prophecies is fully discussed in chapter XII of this book. We meet with it here for the first time.

The passage has also its great importance in the history of the development of Old Testament religion. It is one of the first statements in Hebrew literature of the problem of why the wicked prosper. Probably this prophecy of Jeremiah precedes that of Habakkuk

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[4] See chapter XII, p. 202.

(1:12-2:3), which is usually thought of as the earliest statement of this problem. It was forced upon the reflective mind of Jeremiah by the treatment which he received from the men of Anatoth. And this early presentation of his case illustrates the method of Jeremiah of dealing with God. His rugged and honest mind will not overlook the difficulties as they arise. And with a boldness which often looks like impiety, but actually illustrates the intimacy of Jeremiah's relation with God, he states his case and looks for his answer. The answer which was given to Jeremiah is not essentially different from that which was given later to both Habakkuk and to Job. None of these answers satisfy a merely speculative curiosity. The Bible contains no offhand solutions to life's deepest problems. Instead it makes immense demands on heroism and summons one to faith and to endurance. Habakkuk was told (2:1-4) that the issue of it all was in God's hands, and that in His own time God would order the world according to His just and predetermined Will. In the meantime all the righteous man had to do was to remain faithful. Similarly, Job was reminded (chapter 42) that this problem belonged to God and not to him, and that submission to the Will of God, which one should not presume to understand, would issue in a personal experience of God that would be the rich reward of faith.

In the case of Jeremiah, essentially the same answer is given, but with a dramatic force and appeal which cannot fail to startle us as it must have startled Jeremiah. Not only is he told that it is not for him to know the hidden counsels of God, but he is reminded that for him the situation will get worse before it gets better. If he cannot understand matters now, he will be even more unable to understand them later on. If his heart fails him now, where will he be when the real test comes? If running with footmen has wearied him, how can he contend with horses? Compared with what is in store for him, he has thus far lived in a land of comparative peace. If he has not been able to stand what has happened, how can he stand what is about to happen? It is as if the Lord said: "Cheer up, Jeremiah, the worst is yet to come." And Jeremiah cheered up. And he did stand all that happened to him. This appeal of the Bible to all that is most courageous and heroic in men, is one of its most outstanding and glorious characteristics.

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*12:1 plead*=expostulate. *Verse 4.* This verse seems out of its connection. If so, we do not know where it originally belonged. *Verse 5. Wherein thou art secure* (A.V. trustedst). This makes no sense. The passage should read "and if in a land of peace thou fleest, then how," etc. *Pride of Jordan* (A.V. swelling of Jordan). This name was given to the jungle on the banks of the Jordan which was a haunt of lions. (Cf. Zechariah 11:3; Jeremiah 49:19, 50:44.)

# CHAPTER VIII

## QUIET YEARS AT JERUSALEM

Date, 621-608 B. C. Chapters 16:1-9; 5:1-14, 19-31; 6:9-21; 8:4-8; 14; 15:1-4; 9:2-9.

BIOGRAPHERS of Jeremiah have a hard time accounting for the thirteen years which separate the inauguration of the Great Reform from the death of Josiah (621-608 B. C.). Here is a period covering nearly one-third of the public ministry of Jeremiah. Yet there are no portions of his book which can with any degree of certainty be assigned to it, and we know little or nothing of what Jeremiah was saying or doing during these thirteen years. Some scholars say that the reason for this is that he said nothing and did nothing. But Jeremiah himself gives a different account of himself. He declares (chapter 25:3) that "from the thirteenth year of Josiah," that is to say, from the day of his call to be a prophet in 626 B. C., "even unto this day, these three and twenty years, the word of the Lord hath come unto me and I have spoken unto you . . ." After all allowance for rhetorical exaggeration has been made, it hardly seems possible that Jeremiah could have referred to an uninterrupted prophecy, if there were an actual hiatus of thirteen years.

The problem, then, is to account for these years on the basis of the material which we possess. We may assume, in the first place, that Jeremiah has now transferred his residence from Anatoth to Jerusalem. The fact of his persecution at the hands of his fellow-townsmen, together with Jeremiah's growing prominence as a prophet, makes the year 621 B. C. a very probable one as the date when he leaves his country home and makes Jerusalem the scene of his future labors. About this time also he received definite intimation that his was to be a lonely life. He was not to marry. He was to be denied the solace of domestic life and happiness. A sensitive soul like Jeremiah's was especially capable of human love in its deepest and purest forms. But to this he was to remain a stranger.

Only imagination enables us to form any picture of the mode of Jeremiah's life at Jerusalem during this long period of thirteen years. That he was no recluse may be regarded as a certainty. For his book teems with references to all aspects of human life. His description of the joyful as well as the sad scenes in city and country life proves that he must have mingled freely with his countrymen and shared in their every-day experiences. It is likely, however, that his ministry was, at this time, a quiet and even a personal one. This would account for the absence of full description or many details. He was talking, preaching, but largely in private. The years were uneventful years. The Great Reform was still unchallenged. Josiah's beneficent reign had brought peace and prosperity to the people. There were no great events, no great issues, which later were to rouse the prophet and cause him to rise to supreme heights. Hence, he lived quietly and he taught privately. He may have gathered about him some friends and intimates, and to them uttered his convictions concerning the nature of God and His dealings with His people, and concerning the kind of religion which God desired.

Because these prophecies were spoken in this intimate fashion, and because they were not related to any outstanding public or political happening, Jeremiah did not include many of them when he dictated his messages to Baruch. We may therefore call these the brooding years of Jeremiah's life, to be compared with the Arabian years in the life of Paul, years in which his soul grew in tenderness and strength, years in which his conception of religion became more profoundly spiritual. During these years, also, we may imagine that Jeremiah's fellowship with his God, his own personal communion with God, grew in intimacy. Beyond such a sketch as this, however, we cannot go in our effort to describe this portion of Jeremiah's life and ministry.

The question is, are there *any* of the prophecies in our present book of Jeremiah, which, with any degree of likelihood, may be assigned to this period? It may be admitted at once that there are none which with certainty belong to this second half of Josiah's reign. Yet there are certain undated prophecies which, with some degree of assurance, may be assigned to these thirteen years.[1] No one can be sure to what period in Jeremiah's ministry they belong. Some students of the book will assign them to one period and some to another. All that can be said is that there is no reason why they may not belong to this period of thirteen years, and that, when brought together they give us a good picture of what may well have been his life there, and of the probable growth of his own spiritual experience.

1. Chapter 16:1-9. Here we have an autobiographical reference in which Jeremiah discloses the

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[1] Skinner, op. cit., pp. 108-137.

reason why he lived a lonely life without wife or children. This passage has no indication of date, but it seems natural to assign it to this obscure period in his life and ministry. This was part of his preparatory discipline. It was another exclusive claim of God upon his whole nature. There was to be room for nothing else. His whole soul was to be given to God alone and to the tragic mission to which he was called. It is natural to suppose that this conviction, so vivid as to amount to a special revelation of the Will of God, should have come early in his life and ministry. At this time Jeremiah was thirty years old. And once more his life diverges from the ordinary life of his countrymen. He defied the custom of the world to which he belonged. He lived a lonely and a solitary life. He was not to have friendly intercourse with his neighbors, sharing in occasions of grief and of joy, of mourning and of merrymaking, because all alike were doomed in the impending fate of Jerusalem. It is impossible not to compare this state of mind of Jeremiah with the earlier utterances of Paul about marriage, in view of his early belief in a speedy second Advent of Christ.

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*Verse 5. Mourning.* The word literally means "shrill crying" and refers to the piercing wail of professional mourners.[2] *Verse 6. Cut themselves.* This mourning custom is forbidden in Leviticus 19:28, Deuteronomy 14:1. But they are mentioned as "quite normal" in Jeremiah 41:5, Amos 8:10, Isaiah 22:12, Micah 1:16, Ezekiel 7:18. It should not be inferred that Jeremiah approved of them. *Verse 7.* The better reading is: "Break bread for the mourner, to comfort him for the dead." The mourner was accustomed to fast (2 Samuel 1:12, 3:35) on the day of the burial, after which, to comfort him, his friends would give him food.

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[2] *Jeremiah* 4:8, St. Mark, 5:38.

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2. Chapter 5:1-14. It is a conjecture, but an interesting one, that these verses describe the first impressions of Jeremiah as he finds himself a permanent resident in Jerusalem. He roams through the streets and can hardly find an honest man. He is cheated, and the man who cheats him swears by a solemn oath that he has not done so. Jeremiah says to himself: these are the ignorant and uneducated. I will go to men of high station. But when he does so, he finds that they too have broken away from truth, honor and obedience. Here is the experience of a man making his acquaintance with city life. He has been in the city before, but he has not known it. Now he has settled there, and his disillusionment begins at once. He comes to realize how deep the corruption of the people is, and the magnitude of the task which lies before him. His sense of despair in the face of the depravity of the people, coupled with their false sense of security, finds utterance in this passage.

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*Verse 3.* We do not know what disaster is here referred to. *Verse 5. Judgment* = ordinance. *Verse 7. Assembled themselves in troops.* A better reading, "made themselves at home." *Verse 8. As fed horses,* i.e. as full-fed stallions. *Verse 12. It is not he,* i.e. he will do nothing of the kind.[3]

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[3] See Zephaniah 1:12.

3. Section 5:19-31 contains the same severe observation and condemnation of the sins of the people. Verse 19, with its definite reference to the exile cannot belong to this period, but verses 22-29, with their vivid description of the way in which the rich have plundered the poor, and extortioners have ensnared the simple unwary people, may well record Jeremiah's impressions of life as he saw it during these years. We can witness the mounting indignation of the prophet, and the growth of his passionate, moral protest against this degradation. The whole of the future ministry of Jeremiah rests upon the convictions gained during these years of acquaintance with the inmost character and heart of the people.

> What all classes regard as perfectly normal, so completely has custom numbed their moral sensibilities, seems to Jeremiah, with his soul so finely sensitive to ethical and spiritual values, a spectacle that should excite the deepest amazement and horror.[4]

4. Chapter 6:9-16 continues the same course of thought. Verse 9 joins admirably with verse 31 of chapter 5. Just as the Northern Kingdom has suffered, so Judah also is to be thoroughly gleaned. In verse 14 Jeremiah touches one of the most ominous features of the time, the frivolous optimism of the nation's leaders.

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*Verse 10.* The hearing of the people needs to be improved (cf. Acts 7:51). *Verse 11, pour it out;* not the imperative, but the future, is probable: "I will pour it out." *Verses 12-15,* cf. 8:10-12 where the present passage is repeated. *Verse 15, cast down* = to stumble (Revised Version margin).

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[4] A. S. Peake, op. cit., I, pp. 135-6.

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5. In the verses which follow, 6:16-21, "one writer (Schmidt) thinks we can discover the earliest evidence of Jeremiah's opposition to the spirit of Deuteronomy."[5] It is a familiar and a beautiful passage, in which the prophet summons the people back to the old paths, to the old ways, where rest and peace alone are to be found. The old way, if this interpretation of the passage is correct, is the way of the moral law and the ethical requirements of the Mosaic revelation. The new way is the way of costly ritual and new-fangled forms of sacrifice. Only by abandoning these specious forms of worship and returning whole-heartedly to God in moral obedience, can salvation be found. Such is the general sense of a passage which Dr. Skinner feels almost certainly belongs to this period of Jeremiah's ministry. At any rate it does suggest the growing disapproval with which the prophet would view the reliance placed upon a purely external form of worship as of the essence of real religion.

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*Verse 16.* The people must return to where the ways part, and then take the other turn. *Rest for your souls.*[6] Not in the Gospel sense of peace and fellowship with God, but outward safety as a result of obedience to God's commands. *Verse 18.* The text is corrupt and does not make sense. A probable rendering is: "wherefore hear, ye heavens, and bear witness against them." This matches the appeal to earth in verse 19. *Verses 20-21,* cf. Amos 5:21-25, Isaiah 1:11-14.

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[5] Quoted in Skinner, ibid., p. 115.

[6] "Centuries later Jesus used these same words in His immortal appeal (St. Matthew 11:29) not as a conscious quotation, but as something that once heard is unforgettable, and had become His own by spiritual appropriation and been deepened by personal experience." Bewer, op. cit., p. 145.

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6. Chapter 8:4-8. It is possible, as some scholars urge, that this section belongs to the same period as chapter 7 and that it may even be the "metrical counterpart" of the Temple sermon contained in that chapter. It seems, however, more natural to take this passage as indicating the slow growth in Jeremiah's mind of the conviction that the centralization of worship in Jerusalem had in it elements that were dangerous to the cause of real religion. That conviction reaches its climax in chapter 7. Here we find him, as it were, brooding over the matter. If men fall, they are quick to get to their feet again. If they lose their way, they are quick to retrace their steps. But Judah falls and makes no attempt to rise; goes astray and does not return. There is no sign anywhere that the people are conscious of wrongdoing. No one thinks of repenting but plunges headlong on his ruinous course. The birds all know by instinct the time of their migration. And the instinct of the birds has its parallel in the impulse of the soul, directing man to loyalty and obedience to God. There is in man this "homing instinct" which points him to God:

Rivers to the ocean run
Nor stay in all their course;
Fires ascending seek the sun,
Both speed them to their source.
So, a soul that's born of God
Pants to view His glorious face;
Upward tends to His abode,
To rest in His embrace.

Yet the people of Israel who have had a special implanting of the Divine Nature, have forgotten God. Sin thus reveals itself to Jeremiah as the perversion of a deep-seated principle or instinct of the soul. The people pride themselves (verse 8) on having a written Law; they do not know the religion of the spirit. And because that written Law has taken the place of real religion, it is a false and pernicious activity of scribes, and not the real Word of the Living God. Readers of this passage will be reminded immediately of the similar attitude of Jesus toward the binding, written precepts of the Rabbinical Law.[7] "The contrast between the religion of the letter and the religion of the spirit could not be more finely described than in these lines" (verse 8).

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*8:5.* Omit the words *of Jerusalem. Verse 6.* It is not clear whether the Lord or the prophet is the speaker. *Verse 7;* cf. Isaiah 1:3. The reference to the migration of birds is a more subtle one than the corresponding idea in Isaiah. "Turtle" means turtle-dove. *Verse 8.* The people reply that they do know the law of the Lord, if not as an inward instinct, at least as an outward ordinance. This may or may not refer to Deuteronomy. If it does, the answer of Jeremiah that the scribes have falsified it, will not apply to its ethical precepts, but only to that perversion of its idea of worship which was described in the previous chapter. If it does not, the "law of the Lord" will refer only to regulations of which we have no record, which had been manufactured by the scribes and prescribed as if they had been divinely ordained.

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[7] Skinner, ibid., p. 120.

7. Chapters 14; 15:1-4. In this section are found several prophecies all linked together because they refer to a terrible drought. There is no reason why the language here should be regarded as figurative. Droughts were not uncommon, and one of these may well have occurred in the later years of Josiah's reign. The series of prophecies begins with a characteristic description of the suffering of city and country (chapter 14:2-6) and concludes with two prayers (verses 7-9, 19-22) by the people, to each of which the Lord returns His answer (chapter 14:10-12, chapter 15:1-4).

The interesting question has been raised whether these two prayers are the prayers of Jeremiah for the people, or the prayers of the people for themselves which Jeremiah has reported and transcribed. The prayers of Jeremiah are a most interesting study, and, as we shall see later, rise high above the level of much Old Testament petition. These two prayers, however, simply reproduce the popular conception of the relation of God to His people. He is asked to save them and thus redeem His reputation (verse 7); or, to prove that He is not like a transient guest, or like a man asleep, lacking either the desire or ability to save them (verses 8-9); or, He is implored to show how superior He is to the gods of the Gentiles (verse 22). All of this suggests the ideas of popular religion, but not the religious ideas of Jeremiah. On the other hand, the answers of the Lord to these petitions with their stern rejection of the prayer for deliverance, doubtless do represent and reproduce the mood of Jeremiah. It is, therefore, more natural to suppose that Jeremiah reported the prayers of the people as he had heard them, and then himself gave the answer of the Lord.

Another important element in the ministry of Jeremiah is suggested in the reference to the "false prophets" (verses 13-16).[8] From now on to the end of his life, Jeremiah has to contend with these "false prophets," just as Paul had to contend with the Judaizers. It would be a mistake to imagine that these prophets were conscious deceivers, mere charlatans or mountebanks. Rather they were "patriot-prophets" truly grieved over Jeremiah's wholesale condemnation of the people, and over his prophecies of doom and disaster. They claimed also to have some knowledge of the Will of God, and sought to reassure and console the people. To the people, it must have seemed as if they were much nearer to God. But Jeremiah is so convinced of the Truth that has come to him, a Truth vindicated by every event of later history, that he sweeps these "patriot-prophets" aside and calls them false, and includes them in the punishment that is to befall the nation. There is no clear indication that this portion of the chapter belongs with the rest, but, for the sake of convenience, it is considered here.

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*Chapter 14, Verse 2. Gates,* i.e. the people assembled at the gates, the meeting-place of the people, where judgment was given. *Verse 3. Cover their heads.* See 2 Samuel 15:30, 19:4. *Verse 4. Chapt,* i.e. cracked. The verb means dismayed (Revised Version margin). *Verse 6. Jackals*: better "crocodiles" (Revised Version margin) who lift their heads out of the water to snuff up the air. *Verse 7. For thy name's sake,* i.e. for the sake of thy reputation among the heathen (Joshua 7:9; Numbers 14:13-16; Isaiah

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[8] A full discussion of this subject will be found in chapter XIV of this book.

48:9-11; Psalm 79:9, 10). *Verse 9. Astonied,* the better reading is "fast asleep" (Psalm 44:23, 24; Psalm 78:65; 1 Kings 18:27; St. Mark 4:38). *Verse 10.* The Lord's answer. Quoted, in part, from Hosea 8:13. *Verse 18. "Go about in the land."* Possibly this means as beggars. Some change the text to give the meaning: "crouch on the ground." *Verse 19.* Here the people's prayer is renewed. *Verse 21,* cf. Jeremiah 17:12, Ezekiel 43:7. Because Jehovah was thought of as enthroned above the Ark in the Temple, Jerusalem is spoken of as the Lord's throne. *Chapter 15:1,* cf. Exodus 32:11-14, 30-32; Numbers 14:13-24; Deuteronomy 9:18-20, 25-29; 1 Samuel 7:8, 9; 12:19-23; Psalm 99:6-8. *Cast them out,* i.e. the people. *Verse 2, death* = pestilence. See Job 27:15; Revelation 2:23, 6:8. These are the four kinds of fate. See Jeremiah 43:11; Ezekiel 14:21, 33:27.

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8. Chapter 9:2-9. These verses reveal a profound spirit of sadness because of the treachery and corruption of the people. The prophet represents himself as compelled to breathe a polluted social atmosphere. Better a lonely comfortless khan in the desert than a city with its luxuries and treacheries. There presses upon him a sense of estrangement and isolation.

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*Verse 9:1.* This verse should close the eighth chapter. A new section begins with 9:2. *Verse 3.* They use their tongues to shoot slanders. *Verse 4.* A reference to Jacob and Esau. *Verse 6. Thine* must be changed to *their.* *Verse 7. melt* = smelt, with a view to purification.

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If, now, we place these different passages together in our minds, we gain a tolerably clear picture of the life and mood of the prophet during these thirteen years from 621-608 B. C. There is peace and apparent prosperity under the beneficent reign of Josiah. No great event or alarm disturbs the people or arouses the prophet. Jeremiah leads a quiet and uneventful life at Jerusalem. It is borne in on him that he is to live a lonely and solitary life. The more he observes the people, their insensibility to the higher claims and duties of their faith, the more his sense of estrangement from them becomes. He withdraws more and more within himself, and confines his teaching to a few friends and intimates. His sense of sin is deepened and intensified. One feels that there is something very personal about this. Jeremiah has, so to speak, a vicarious conviction of sin. Thus his experience of it was far more intimate than that of the earlier prophets. They saw it and thundered against it. But Jeremiah not only sees it, he feels it. Looking into the heart of this man, one sees the suffering of a pure and sensitive soul condemned to live in the midst of moral pollution. When he speaks, it is out of the depths of this acute personal experience of the terrible reality of evil. No wonder that he screams. No wonder that his voice becomes harsh and shrill. As he watches the results of the Great Reform upon the religious habits of the people, he becomes increasingly convinced that this external method can never bring to pass that inward revival of faith which alone can spell the nation's salvation. Increasingly the sense of the inevitableness of their doom grows upon him. How to reconcile this conviction with the prophet's frequent and impassioned appeals to the people to repent, probably never occurred to Jeremiah himself. He felt both of these things and he uttered both of these things. To try to soften either one of them in the interest of the other is to do injustice to the soul of the prophet. Precisely in the inability to reconcile them, we touch the depths of the spiritual tragedy of Jeremiah's life. And while this dark panorama is being unfolded before his eyes, he himself is being drawn nearer and nearer to God in a spiritual intimacy which finds no parallel in the Old Testament. "Through tribulation and inward desolation he came to know that in his personal fellowship with God he possessed the secret of religion and the victory that overcomes the world." [9]

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[9] Skinner, op. cit., p. 137.

# CHAPTER IX

## JEREMIAH AND JEHOIAKIM

### I

Date, 608-604 B.C. Chapters 8:14-22; 9:1; 22:1-9, 10-12, 13-19; 13:1-14; 18; 19; 20:1-6; 11:9-17.

In the year 608 B. C. occurred the catastrophe which not only changed the whole course of Jeremiah's career, but also precipitated the collapse of the Southern Kingdom. King Josiah was killed at the battle of Megiddo, while fighting at the head of his army against the Egyptians (2 Kings 23:29, 30; 2 Chronicles 35:21ff).

It will always remain something of a mystery why Josiah felt it necessary to fight against the Egyptians at all. Judah was at peace with Egypt, and in entering Palestine, the Egyptians were simply crossing the country in order to reach Syria. At this time the Assyrian Empire was tottering to its fall, and Egypt felt that the time was ripe to seize Syria, which she had long coveted. It may be that Josiah felt that the possession of Syria by Egypt would be a threat against the independence of his own kingdom. He doubtless yielded to the advice of pseudo-patriots, who resented the advance of the Egyptians through his territory. Probably also he expected a victory now that his people were observing the Law. This unhappy decision to oppose the Egyptians cost him his life, and Judah her freedom.

It seems surprising that Jeremiah did nothing to dissuade Josiah from his reckless and fatal purpose to oppose the Egyptians. At least we have no prophecy that can be read as such a warning.[1] This silence is in sharp contrast to the prophet's attitude later on in Jehoiakim's reign. It is evident that Jeremiah has not yet assumed the rôle of the religious statesman. His political ministry had not yet begun.

1. In chapter 8:14-22; 9:1 it is probable that we have a description of the bewilderment of the people after this unexpected disaster. The passage is undated, and its historical setting can be determined only by internal evidence. The first verses describe "the collapse of the national spirit under some overwhelming disaster, and (verses 18-22) the effect on the prophet's mind." [2] Some scholars have felt that the passage refers to the Scythian invasions. But the whole tone of this passage makes this reference impossible. The sudden, dramatic and transient invasion of the Scythians produced excitement, nervous terror, national alarm. But here the whole passage gives the impression of hopelessness, of stupefaction, of national despair. And with this corresponds the state of mind of the prophet who does not see a ray of light as he peers into the future. There is no balm in Gilead. There is no physician who can heal the nation's wounds. "Oh, that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears" (9:1).

While, therefore, it is always precarious to assign a definite date to a passage like this, it is not going too far to say that "there is but one situation known to us which would enable us in some measure to combine its various allusions, and that is the time of consternation and dismay which must have followed the battle of

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[1] See 1 Esdras 1:28 where it is assumed that Jeremiah must have warned the king. This, however, simply represents a later tradition.

[2] Skinner, op. cit., pp. 126, 127.

Megiddo." To Jeremiah, the disaster meant more than to any other inhabitant of Jerusalem. He shared the sorrow, the shame, the national humiliation which all the people felt. In addition, however, he foresaw the terrible results of this catastrophe upon the religious life and future of the people. Josiah had been the incarnation of the religious Ideal, and with his death that Ideal was once more threatened by atheism and irreligion. Without doubt, also, Jeremiah had some premonition of the profound change which this event was to produce in his own life. Without warning, as it were, the dark thundercloud of fate had spread over the heavens and had enveloped his nation and himself in its ominous blackness.

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*Chapter 8: verse 14.* The mind of the prophet runs forward to the coming of the invader when the people will flee to the fortified cities. The same idea is carried out in the following verses. *Water of gall,* see Deuteronomy 29:18. *Verse 17. Basilisk,* a fabulous creature, like adders. Revised Version, margin. *Verse 18.* The literal rendering of the first words is "my brightness in sorrow," i.e. "my sorrow is incurable," a characteristic utterance of the prophet's deep emotion at the thought of the ruin of the people. *Verse 19.* Either the prophet is anticipating the exile ("the land that is very far off") or the phrase may mean "from the wide-stretching land," i.e. the cry of the people from all over Palestine. Such is its meaning in Isaiah 33:17. *Verse 20.* "To understand this famous verse, we must remember that 'the harvest' and 'the summer' were quite distinct seasons in Palestine. If the harvest failed (April to June), the people might still look forward to the fruit, but if the fruit also failed, famine stared them in the face" (Peake). *Verse 21. Black.* The prophet is clad in mourning. *Verse 22. Balm.* A familiar quotation. The word "balm," however, is a mistranslation, since the balsam is not found in Gilead. The resin of the mastic tree is meant, which was used as a remedy. Judah possesses in herself no remedy for her disease. There is no physician that can heal her. There is no fresh flesh (health) to cover her wounds. *Chapter 9:1* closes with a passionate outburst of sorrow, the lament of the prophet over the ruin into which the nation is plunged. The beginning of a new chapter with this verse is an unfortunate division.

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With the defeat at Megiddo, "the most tragic event in Hebrew history,"[3] the Hebrew kingdom lost its independence and became tributary to Egypt. There was a brief breathing spell, however, which the prophetic party utilized. They set aside the eldest son of Josiah who was known to be opposed to the prophetic Reform, and made his younger brother Jehoahaz king. But Jehoahaz had no opportunity to show what he could do. For Necho, the Egyptian king, returning from his victorious campaign, lured Jehoahaz away from Jerusalem, put him in chains and sent him to Egypt after a brief reign of only three months (2 Kings 23:31-34). Evidently Necho was not inclined to take any chances with Jehoahaz. The very fact that he was the choice of the prophetic party was enough to show that in their judgment he, rather than Jehoiakim, could be depended upon to carry out the policy of his father, and seek to maintain the independence of the nation. And this was precisely what

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[3] See Kent, *A History of the Hebrew People,* Vol. 3, p. 184.

Necho did not want. Rather he wanted a tool ready to his hand. And in Jehoiakim he found one.

2. In chapter 22:10-12 we find a brief but piteous lament by Jeremiah over the fate of Jehoahaz (his original name was Shallum, 1 Chronicles 3:15). His father had died gloriously fighting at the head of his army. Shed no tears for him. But weep bitterly for the humiliating fate of this unhappy king who will never again see his native land. The prophet has it from the Lord himself, that Jehoahaz shall never return. This little dirge is found in verse 10, and it is thus translated by Smith:

Weep not for the dead,
  Nor bemoan him,
But for him that goeth away weep sore,
  For he cometh no more,
Nor seeth the land of his birth.[4]

Verses 11 and 12 are in prose and may be a later addition. They amplify in a rather diffuse style what has already been said.

In the place of Jehoahaz, Necho made his older brother king. His original name was Eliakim (2 Kings 23:34), but after his accession he took the name of Jehoiakim, and thus he is known to history as the arch-enemy of Jeremiah. His character has already been described. He was the vain, selfish son of a noble father. He had no interest in Josiah's reform of the religious life of the people. With his accession, the prophetic party lost all of its influence and control, and the reactionary, half-pagan element among both priests and people came back into their own. There was a mighty reaction against the Deuteronomic reforms. All of the slumbering revolt against the abolition of local shrines and the degradation of the local priesthood broke out in a flame of resentment. There began almost immediately a régime of religious crimes and of political mistakes which resulted, within less than twenty-five years, in the final destruction of Jerusalem and of the Southern Kingdom. Jehoiakim was the typical despot, blind alike to the appeal of his God and to the interests of his people. His chief ambition was to curry favor with his powerful neighbors, to truckle to them, and to imitate the luxuries of the courts of Egypt and Babylon. The tribute which Necho had demanded was exacted from the people, while Jehoiakim plundered the public treasury to build for himself large palaces and public buildings. In a word, Jehoiakim was the incarnation of folly, and of irreligion. Most of the heathenish practices of the reign of Manasseh were resumed. All that Josiah and the reformers had attempted to achieve was swept away. Nothing but national and religious ruin awaited the people as the result of the policies of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:35-37).

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[4] *Jeremiah,* published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York, p. 164.

At this point, Jeremiah appears upon the scene. And from now on, he never leaves it. There is much that is obscure about the early life of Jeremiah. We know very little, as we have seen, about the thirteen years which separate the inauguration of the Great Reform from the death of Josiah. But from the year 608 B.C. onward, Jeremiah lives in the limelight. There is not an incident in the public and political life of the people with which he is not connected. He stands out not only as the most conspicuous, but as the only really conspicuous figure of his time. Jehoiakim himself is only a foil, as it were, to reveal and to display the spirit of Jeremiah. It is from now on that this noble and heroic soul is shown to us in the fullness of his power, in the depth and intensity of his nature.

It took national disaster, and the challenge of vice and irreligion to reveal Jeremiah to himself and to the world. Had he died before 608 B. C. he would have been remembered, if at all, as an obscure prophet who revealed in his few prophecies a tenderness, a depth, a passion that bespoke a nature sensitive alike to the external world and to the moral voice of God. And we would have known him to be a brave man because he fearlessly espoused the prophetic reform. It is, however, in the years which follow 608 B. C. that Jeremiah becomes one of the world's immortals. We must imagine that the brooding prophet was aroused by the battle of Megiddo; that from that hour he began to put on his spiritual harness, and, from the moment that Jehoiakim revealed himself to be the man that he was, sprang forward single-handed and alone, to throw down the gauntlet to that selfish tyrant and to become the champion of Jehovah. It is in such a light from now on that the character and career of Jeremiah must be studied and understood.

3. Chapter 22:1-9, 13-19. Apparently no time was lost. No sooner was Jehoiakim on the throne, no sooner had he begun to put his wicked policies into effect, than Jeremiah confronted him. And from then on, Jeremiah continued to confront him. The earliest encounters between these two human opposites is probably described for us in chapter 22:1-9, 13-19. Just how soon after Jehoiakim became king, this word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, we cannot know. It is not necessary, however, to suppose that it was long delayed. The prophet was sent to the palace to tell the king and the princes and the people that if they would do justly, and practice righteousness, and keep

22 1st visit — at court
5 [illegible]

to the way of the Lord, national prosperity might be expected. Otherwise, the whole land would be made a wilderness, the nation would be utterly destroyed.

This is Jeremiah's first recorded appearance at court. We must assume that he was roused from his quiet and obscure life, that this dramatic message was actually put into his mouth, and that he went to the king's palace and actually delivered it. Jehoiakim had probably heard of Jeremiah before now. Jeremiah's advocacy of the Great Reform had brought him more or less into public notice. And during these thirteen years of quiet residence and work at Jerusalem, Jeremiah's reputation and influence must have reached the ears of the court, as well as of the people. But the event recorded in this chapter doubtless represents Jehoiakim's first real acquaintance with Jeremiah, an acquaintance which was destined to ripen and deepen as the years went by. There is nothing to indicate the immediate effect produced by this dramatic appearance and announcement of Jeremiah. The sequel, however, tells the story.

There is the usual question about the integrity of the text in this section. The first five verses, it is said, belong to a period when a reform in the administration might avert the national doom, whereas verses 6-9 belong to a later period when the fate of the nation was apparently sealed. It is possible, however, to treat the section as a unity, and this we have done.[5]

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*22:1. Go down.* The prophet is thought of as in the Temple which was on higher ground than the palace. *Verse 5. I swear by myself.* See Genesis

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[5] It is probable that verses 11-12 of chapter 21 belong here also. 21:12 is a variant of 22:3.

22:16, Amos 6:8, Isaiah 45:23, Jeremiah 49:13, Jeremiah 51:14, Hebrews 6:13-18. *Verse 6.* The point of comparison lies in the fact that Gilead and Lebanon are richly wooded. As ruinous a destruction would come as if these regions were denuded of their trees.

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While, as we have seen, chronology is difficult and always problematical in following the course of Jeremiah's career, it seems probable that time enough had elapsed between verses 1-9 and 13-19 of chapter 22, to indicate clearly what kind of an administration Jehoiakim's was to be, and with what kind of a character Jeremiah had henceforth to deal. For in the latter section, Jeremiah describes with some detail the vicious elements of the public policies of King Jehoiakim. He pronounces a curse upon the king for building huge palaces through extortion and unjust taxation. His father Josiah had had a different conception of how to govern, and espoused the cause of the people instead of oppressing them. Thus he had won favor with God. But Jehoiakim had an eye for nothing except luxury and debauching the real welfare of the people. There follows the terrible malediction of Jeremiah which he hurls full in the face of the king. He will die without being mourned and without receiving decent burial. "The full horror of this fate is only dimly realized by the modern reader for whom nothing that happens to a dead body can really matter." [6] But in antiquity it mattered very much indeed. The prediction, repeated in chapter 36:30, was probably fulfilled, although the account in 2 Kings 24:6 contains no specific record of it. It is fair, however, to assume that if it had not been fulfilled, the editors would have suppressed it in both passages where it occurs.[7]

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[6] A. S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 256.

It requires no stretch of the imagination to picture the effect which such a dynamic utterance as this must have produced at the court of the king. But it is only one of many which were to follow. That Jeremiah could have spoken like this without suffering at once the loss of his liberty, if not of his life, must remain more or less a mystery. If Jeremiah survived Jehoiakim it was not because he used any caution or allowed his message to be determined by any motives of self-consideration. We touch in this chapter only one of the many instances of moral intrepidity which stamps Jeremiah as one of the most fearless and selfless men of whom we have knowledge.

We must consider more carefully later on the qualities of Jeremiah's moral indignation. Here it is sufficient to point out that his intense love of righteousness made him an equally intense hater of evil. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Psalm 97:10). His detestation of Jehoiakim lay in the fact that Jehoiakim personified the wickedness of the people. Whether there were personal or vindictive elements in this hatred of the king, must be discussed later. As we have already seen, however, Jeremiah, like other great spiritual geniuses, was doubtless a man of profound passions, and even irascible temper. And we shall not expect to find in him that higher love, broad charity and boundless good-will of which Jesus Christ is the perfect exemplar.

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*Chapter 22, verse 13. Chambers:* rooms built on the roof, cooler than lower rooms. *Verse 18.* Jere-

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[7] See also chapter XI, p. 193.

Sym

miah is quoting the familiar formula of lamentation (1 Kings 13:30, cf. chapter 34:5). For *"his glory"* we may better read "his majesty." *Verse 19.* Probably this means no burial at all. A dead animal would be left for birds and beasts to devour.

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4. Chapter 13:1-14. The prophecies contained in this section are not dated. We are not going far wrong, however, if we assign them to the early years of Jehoiakim's reign. The prophet is now in the full swing of his public ministry, and politics and religion have become thoroughly corrupt. The prophet, therefore (verses 1-12), resorts to symbolic action to dramatize, as it were, before the people the moral situation in which they find themselves. We shall find Jeremiah doing this again and again in his efforts to make the people visualize their state of moral corruption as he sees it and knows it.

Jeremiah receives a command from the Lord to take a loin cloth, wear it, and then take it to the Euphrates and hide it in a hole in the rock. This he does, and returns to Jerusalem. He goes again to the Euphrates, takes out the girdle and discovers that it has been spoiled by the dampness. The meaning of the little drama is that Israel which God caused to cleave to him as a loin cloth to the body of a man, has been spoiled by corruption.

Some scholars have found this story of a double trip to the Euphrates on such a simple errand so ridiculous that they have dismissed the incident as impossible. Others have sought to find a spot near Anatoth (Parah) the name of which resembles that of the Euphrates, as the scene of the allegory. It is much more natural, however, to regard the incident as sym-

See X context

bolic. Jeremiah appears wearing a ragged loin cloth. He calls attention to it, and then, in figurative language, which all his hearers would be quick to understand, describes how it became spoiled. Then he drives the lesson home. Just as the loin cloth was marred, so God would mar the pride of Judah. "The house of Israel in its early purity enjoyed the closest and most intimate relations with its God, but it became unfit for this when it deteriorated under the influence of heathenism. Hence God would cast it off."[8]

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*13:1.* *Linen* was worn by priests, and thus was suited to represent what the Lord had designed for Israel. *Put it not in water,* as was usually done to take the stiffness out of it. Water is not to touch it. "The girdle in this state represents Israel in its unspoiled purity." *Verse 5.* The linen is buried beneath the surface so that the dampness spoils it. *Verses 9-10.* The text of these verses has been glossed. The original meaning was, not that the pride of Judah was to be humbled by national ruin (i.e. the exile), but that the soul of the people has been marred by corruption.

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In verses 12-14, we have a little parable. Jeremiah often spoke in parables, taking his illustrations, as Jesus did long years later, from the familiar scenes of everyday life. Indeed this parable inevitably reminds us of Jesus' saying about putting new wine into old bottles. The meaning of this short parable by Jeremiah is that just as jars filled with wine often jostle against each other until they are broken and destroyed,

[8] A. S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 192.

so the men of Judah filled with drunkenness will dash against each other until they perish. The idea may seem somewhat bizarre, but its general meaning is plain. Verse 14 contains a problem for anyone trained in the Christian idea of God. It needs always to be remembered that Jeremiah preceded the Christian revelation by six full centuries. If we compare Jeremiah's conceptions of God with the ideas of his contemporaries, we shall be doing him the justice which belongs to him. And we need to remember that terrible as these descriptions of the wrath of God are, Jeremiah beyond every other Old Testament prophet represents the reverse side of the character of God, His love, His pity, His tenderness, His broken-hearted and agonizing desire to save His people, a remnant of which shall be redeemed.

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*13:12.* We may imagine that there was some festival, and that Jeremiah addresses the guests. The sight of the empty jars suggests the parable. *Bottle:* an earthen jar is meant (48:12, Isaiah 30:14). *Verse 13.* The people drink the vial of God's wrath and reel helplessly against each other. They have neither wit nor courage to face their difficulties (25:15-28, Ezekiel 23:31-34, Isaiah 51:17, Psalm 60:3).

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5. Chapters 18, 19, 20:1-6. The material found in these chapters forms a unity in that it deals with lessons drawn from the potter and his work. The question if this is an editorial unity only, or if the teaching of these chapters and its immediate results took place at one time, cannot be settled. Most scholars take the former view, owing to the difficulty of

making all sections in these chapters fit into the same political situation. These matters will be briefly dealt with as they arise. And we are allowed, broadly speaking, to place their teaching in the early years of Jehoiakim's reign. It is a continuation of the preaching in parables, and the general moral lessons are the same.

(1) Chapter 18. "The word of the Lord" is now the familiar formula to describe the Divine inspiration which comes to the prophet. He went down to the potter's house and saw the potter at work "on the wheels," just as the traveler in Palestine may see him to-day. If one vessel was spoiled in the making, then the potter made another. So, Israel is clay in the Lord's hand. Repentance may avert their doom, but sin is sure to be punished. Israel's sin is without parallel and thus bitter punishment must result.

Several interesting and important questions are suggested by this chapter. This is the first emergence in Scripture of the figure of the potter and his vessel, which has had such large historical importance in the history of Christian theology. St. Paul based upon this chapter his discussion of Divine Foreknowledge, which resulted in the doctrines of election and predestination which ruled all Christian thinking for over a thousand years. Thus Jeremiah may be thought of as the grandfather of much Christian theology.

Again, the chapter raises the question, which must be faced over and over again in the study of Jeremiah, whether or not the prophet believed that the people would repent. If he did, why does he assert with such confidence that punishment is in store for the nation? If he did not, why urge the people to repent, with such passion, and with such promises of forgiveness and deliverance?[9] We touch here as we have already seen, one of those spiritual paradoxes which admit of no logical solution. There can be no question of the utter sincerity of the prophet in both of these apparently contradictory attitudes. It is merely a concrete illustration in the intense prophetic consciousness, of the familiar dilemma of determination and free will. The will of the people is free, therefore they may repent. Yet the whole course of the prophetic inspiration leads Jeremiah to the tragic conviction that they will not repent, and that their doom is sure.

There is involved in this section, also, the intricate question of the relation of the human and the Divine will. Thus in verse 4, the failure of the potter to make a good vessel was not due to any fault in his handling of the material, but to some flaw in the material itself. Yet He cannot be defeated permanently. He will reshape it according to His desire. The reader should compare Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra* (stanza XXV to the end). Cf. also, Isaiah, 29:16, 45:9, 64:8, Ecclesiasticus 33:13, and Wisdom of Solomon 15:7.

Verses 13-16 are significant because they emphasize a cardinal teaching of Jeremiah that sin is an unnatural element in the human heart, involving "the perversion of the original instinct for God in the human soul." The eternal snow of Hermon symbolizes the pure nature of that instinct which has become polluted and spoiled by false forms of worship.

Without question, verses 21-23 must be ascribed to some later and bloodthirsty scribe. While, as we have seen, Jeremiah was a man of hot wrath, and while he did not have all of those conceptions of the Divine nature with which the Gospels have familiarized us,

[9] **This question is discussed in full in Skinner, op. cit., pp. 75-79.**

it is impossible to conceive of this man, who had a deep compassion for his people, being guilty of such an outburst of vindictive fury as this.

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*18:2. Go down.* The potter's house was evidently in the lower section of the city. *Verse 3. Wheels,* i.e. the two stones. See Ecclesiasticus 38:29, 30. *Verses 7-10* do not connect very well with the preceding verses, whereas *verse 11* comes in admirably after *verse 6.* It is probable, therefore, that *verses 7-10* are an addition by a later editor. If they are a continuation of *verse 6,* the sense would seem to be that just as the intention of the potter can be changed by some circumstance, so God's intention to weal or woe may be altered by the changed disposition of the people. *Verse 12,* cf. 2:25. *Verse 13,* cf. 2:10-12, 5:30. *Verses 13-14.* The text of these verses is corrupt, and the exact sense is hard to make out. The general meaning, however, is plain. The eternal snows do not melt. The glacier streams do not fail. These maintain their purity and strength. *Verse 17.* The east wind as always in the Old Testament is the sirocco, hot, violent, blowing over and parching the ground.

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(2) Chapter 19. "The link between this section and the preceding is the mention of the potter's vessel in both. The connection is thus quite external." The likelihood is, however, that this incident, like the preceding one, took place in the early years of Jehoiakim's reign. The prophet is told to buy a potter's vessel and to speak to the elders of the people the words which the Lord will put in his mouth. Then he is told to break the vessel before their eyes as a symbol of the

9:14 + 3rd person
20:6

way in which the Lord is to destroy both city and people.

An interesting feature of this section is the fact that from verse 14 of chapter 19, through verse 6 of chapter 20, Jeremiah is, for the first time, spoken of in the third person. Here, then, Jeremiah is being written about. This section, therefore, has been taken, as many later sections of the book of Jeremiah, from the memoirs of Baruch, the intimate friend and amanuensis of Jeremiah to whom the prophet dictated his prophecies.

The teaching of the section in general is simple, and needs no extended comment. It does seem strange that Jeremiah should be told in verse 2 to go to the valley of Ben-Hinnom, where he will receive instructions, yet in verses 3-10, should be told what to say before he gets to the valley at all. The contents of these verses also are so vague, and so reminiscent of the past, that it is probable that they are a later insertion. The reader, therefore, will pass directly from verse 2 to verse 10. The passage, with this omission, is clear and straightforward.

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*19:1. Elders of the priests.* See 2 Kings 19:2. The reading may be simply "the priests." *Verse 2. Vale of Hinnom.* Because it was here (see Jeremiah 7:31, 32), where the abominable, heathenish rites of human sacrifice were practiced. See also 2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6. Josiah had defiled the place (2 Kings 23:6) to prevent the continuance of these rites. *The gate Harsith*, we should render (see Revised Version, margin) "the gate of potsherds," so called because the potters worked nearby. *Verse 12, as Topheth,* that is, as unclean as Topheth (2 Kings 23:10). *Verse 13,* cf. chapter 33:4, 32:29, 2 Kings 23:12, Zephaniah 1:5. *Verse 14.* "It is here presupposed that Jeremiah went to the 'gate of potsherds,' broks the bottle, and uttered the message he was charged to deliver." [10]

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(3) Chapter 20:1-6. The narrative continues in the third person, and is therefore taken from the memoirs of Baruch. After breaking the bottle, Jeremiah returned to the Temple and repeated there the sentence of doom upon the people. But when Pashhur the priest heard Jeremiah, he was enraged. The prophet had committed a double indignity. He had been guilty both of treason and of sacrilege. He had uttered his treason at the very entrance to the Temple where the Lord had guaranteed His protection of His people. So he struck Jeremiah and put him in the stocks. But Jeremiah's indignation had lasted overnight, and the next day he excoriated Pashhur in words which probably lingered in the priest's mind, and he repeated with additions and emphasis his prophecy of doom for the people of Judah.

No one can read this passage without getting a full clear view of the soul of Jeremiah. He has lost all consciousness of himself in the depth and passion of his mission. He has absolutely no sense of fear. He does not hesitate to make this dire prophecy in the ears of the elders, and at the very gate of the Temple. And the punishment which he suffered, the first recorded instance of actual persecution of any prophet of Israel, has no other effect than to deepen his moral ardor. The eyes of all who love moral courage, and who are attracted by high examples of heroism, must henceforth be fastened upon the character and career of this man.

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[10] A. S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 239.

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*20:1. Pashhur.* Rather a common name. See 38:1. *Chief officer,* i.e. overseer, ruler, one whose duty it was to keep order in the Temple. Cf. 29:26. *Verse 2. Upper gate,* i.e. on the north side. *Verse 3. Magor-missabib.* The word means "terror." He will henceforth betray in his looks and conduct the fear that will haunt him. He probably went into exile with Jehoiakim, in 597 B.C. For parallels to this scene, cf. Amos 7:10-17, Isaiah 22:15ff, Acts 23:1-3.

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6. Chapter 11:9-17. This section is undated. It describes a state of things which began to disclose itself at the close of Josiah's reign. The work of the reformers had revealed its weakness, and when Jehoiakim came to the throne, what they had tried to accomplish was partially, at any rate, undone. We reserve for the next chapter a full consideration of verses 15-16. Verses 12 and 13 and 17 are to be omitted. They are repetitious and conventional, and are, without doubt, later additions. In what remains of this section, the Lord complains that the people of Judah have formed a conspiracy against him; that the covenant has been broken (verses 9-10). Therefore the prophet is not to pray for them (verse 14); neither will the prayers of the people in the Temple be of any avail (verse 15). The people once were like a green olive tree. But now that tree is to be destroyed (verse 16).

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*Verse 10. Turned back.* This implies that for a time, presumably during the reformation period, they had forsaken their evil ways. *Verse 14.* The first part of the verse is found in 7:16. *Verse 15.* The text is corrupt and no intelligible translation of it can be made. The general sense, however, is clear. The prophet asks: "Shall fat pieces and holy flesh cause thine evil to pass from thee?" Do the people imagine that outer sacrifices will avert their doom? *Verse 16.* The text of this verse also is corrupt. The general meaning seems to be that the Lord has sent a thunderstorm which has shattered the beauty of the green olive tree with a stroke of lightning.

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In these passages there is clearly outlined the attitude of Jeremiah toward Jehoiakim, his person, and his policies. All that follows is based on this fundamental antagonism of the prophet toward the king who symbolizes all that Jeremiah execrates. Here there can be no truce, no compromise. Truth and falsehood confront each other in these opposing personalities. On Jeremiah's part there is no desire to avoid the issue. Rather he advances boldly to meet it. How boldly is now to appear. For after what may be termed these preliminary skirmishes, a major engagement takes place. In sensational fashion Jeremiah flings caution to the winds, and exposes the irreligion of king and people alike.

# CHAPTER X

## THE TEMPLE SERMON

Date, 608 B. C. Chapters 11:15-16; 26:1-6; 7:3-15; 26:7-24; 7:16-20; 7:21-34

WE arrive at a truly great moment in the history of Jeremiah's life and in the evolution of his faith. Jeremiah may now be said to stand out, clearly revealed alike in the glory of his soul and in the glory of his faith. At some time or other in the early years of the reign of Jehoiakim, he preached in the Temple a sermon, the setting of which is described to us in chapter 26, and the substance of which is given to us in chapter 7:1-15.[1] In order to reconstruct the scene for himself, the reader will first read chapter 26, verses 1-6; then chapter 7:3-15; and finally chapter 26:7-24. The story, thus told, is one of the noblest and spiritually one of the most significant in the whole range of Old Testament literature. For Jeremiah, taking his life in his hands, not only publicly denounces the Temple worship, but also proclaims a spiritual religion as alone pleasing to God, and predicts the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem itself as a punishment for the moral and religious apostasy of the people. Such an episode as this, of course, must have been the culmination of a long period of intense, growing conviction, of deep inward moral indignation, which mounted higher and higher until it finally overflowed in this torrent of selfless spiritual eloquence. We must try to trace the course of this current of moral conviction, before we seek to study the results in which it culminated.

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[1] Nearly alone among modern scholars, Professor George Adam Smith (*Jeremiah,* p. 147) feels that in these two passages we have the record of two different sermons of Jeremiah. He does not see why Jeremiah may not have spoken more than once on the same subject, and he feels that the phrase, "We are delivered" (chapter 7:10), which does not occur in Chapter 26, suits the conditions before rather than after the battle of Megiddo. He therefore places chapter 7 in the reign of Josiah and chapter 26 early in the reign of Jehoiakim. The majority of scholars, however, feel that "the identity of the two occasions is guaranteed by the presence in both chapters of the prediction that God would make the Temple a ruin like Shiloh" (Peake I, p. 146). This view seems much more probable than the other, and is followed in this discussion.

As we have seen,[2] Jeremiah naturally welcomed the Great Reform under Josiah, and gave it, at the beginning, his enthusiastic support. It promised the abolition of the heathen rites at the local sanctuaries, the establishment of a higher moral code than the nation had before known, and a worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem that was purified of all pagan elements. It would have been strange indeed if Jeremiah had not thrown his influence on the side of a movement which promised such results. During his quiet years at Jerusalem, however, Jeremiah had ample opportunity to observe how the Reform actually worked out in practice, after the first wave of moral enthusiasm had subsided. Increasingly it was borne in on him that a truly spiritual religion was not to be won for the people by such external methods as the book of Deuteronomy had proposed. The people were not to be legislated into either religion or morality. Even during the years when Josiah lived, he discovered an increasing formality in religious worship—as if the mere act and fact of worship would satisfy the desires of God. And he discovered that though the moral code might exist as a standard, only some deep inward

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[2] Chapter VII.

11:15-16

and spiritual principle could make it operative in their lives. Instead of that, he saw men going their way as before, living selfish lives, cheating, thieving, greedily grasping after material things and giving no indication of any hunger or thirst after righteousness.

Inevitably the spectacle of all this made its deep impression upon the soul of Jeremiah. Deuteronomy of itself, a book of religion, a moral and religious code, could not spell the spiritual salvation of the people as Jeremiah conceived it and knew it. Gradually, therefore, his attitude veers and changes. His guiding star, all through his career, was that of a truly spiritual religion. What led to that end, he would follow, no matter what happened to himself; what led away from that goal he would condemn no matter if church and state were behind it. It is in the singleness of his spiritual aim, that we can best trace the progress of the soul of Jeremiah.

1. There is a significant passage which may well belong to the closing years of Josiah's reign, although we are not able to date it with precision, which discloses this new attitude of Jeremiah toward the Reform of Deuteronomy. In chapter 11:15-16, we discover Jeremiah watching, as it were, "the hardening of the people's trust in their religious institutions." The people trust in the Temple worship, and have false ideas of security because of their wickedness. Possibly, verse 16 may have been uttered after the battle of Megiddo, when the futility of mere formal worship has been demonstrated by this overwhelming national disaster.[3]

> Here we have an utterance of Jeremiah's private reflections on the new attitude of the people to the Temple and its worship. As he stands in

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[3] **See George Adam Smith, op. cit., pp. 152, 153.**

> the crowded court, beholding the multitude at its devotions, his spirit is stirred and the question rises to his lips, What do they mean by it? What can God think of it? [Do] these men . . . imagine that the performance of sacrificial rites in a sacred place will answer His demands, or avert His wrath?[4]

If this were a question in Jeremiah's mind, the battle of Megiddo was the answer to it. Henceforth, the mind and soul of the prophet were directed against a system which elevated the outward form of religion above its inward spirit.

This, however, does not mean that Jeremiah henceforth condemned the whole of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy itself did not teach any such superstitious ideas about the Temple and about the Temple worship. It had done much "to enhance the prestige of the central sanctuary, but it had been far from the intention of its authors to make the Temple a fetish." With the religious aims of the book of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah was still in hearty sympathy.

With the advent of Jehoiakim, however, the superstitious reverence of the Temple developed until it became dominant. It is interesting to trace the course of this idea in Jewish thought. Its origin probably lies in Isaiah's teaching concerning the inviolability of Zion when threatened by the Assyrians. That idea had somehow become ingrained until it hardened into a fixed dogma in the mind of the people. When, therefore, Deuteronomy assigned a central religious position to the Temple, it was easy to clothe this preëminence with the added idea that the Temple was inviolable. And precisely this course seems to have been followed, with the result that religion degenerated into the grossest form of superstition. And with this growth of Temple superstition, the idea of a moral covenant between Jehovah and His people, which had been the core and substance of the book of Deuteronomy, fell into abeyance. Out of the whole noble effort at a truly religious and moral revival of the nation, there had survived in the popular mind only this fanatical conviction that Temple worship meant national salvation.

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[4] Skinner, ibid., p. 168.

To the mind of Jeremiah this perversion of the spirit not only of Deuteronomy but of all true religion must have become increasingly abhorrent. As we have seen, his attitude toward the Reform movement had been modified, and his early enthusiasm had given way to distrust, and at last to open conviction that no outward reform of itself can ever produce real religion, which is an affair of the spirit. On top of all this came this hideous emergence of sheer Temple superstition. No wonder if the Word of the Lord came at last to the seething soul of Jeremiah. And when the Word of the Lord came, everything else went. Jeremiah must have known, if he had stopped to think of it at all, that he was taking his life in his hands when he went out to deliver this message. But he probably did not think of it at all. He was thinking of something else. And not until he had delivered the message that lay hot upon his soul, did he know any relief. And the relief that he then knew was such that he did not care what happened to him. People who are not prophets cannot know about this. But all people who have ever really prophesied do know about it.

2. The story of how Jeremiah came to preach this dynamic sermon is told us by Baruch in chapter 26:1-6. It is at this point that the "biography" of Jeremiah by Baruch begins, and it continues from then on, with interruptions, through chapter 45. It may have been

used for earlier sections of the book,[5] but from now on it is our chief source of information. The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and told him to stand in the open space before the Temple where all who came to worship could see him and hear him, and utter the message which the Lord had put in his mouth.

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*26:1.* The importance of this address causes Baruch to date it carefully. He usually prefaces his narratives with some chronological note. *Verse 2. The court of the Lord's house;* cf. 19:14. *Keep not back a word,* i.e. even at the peril of your life; cf. Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32. *Verse 3. That I may repent me.* The possibility of repentance is always before the mind of the prophet even when he is most positive in his predictions of disaster. This psychological contradiction is a permanent part of the prophetic consciousness. *Verses 4-6.* The ethical requirements of Deuteronomy still hold. It is only the ritualistic superstitions as a substitute for moral living which the prophet condemns. *Verse 5,* cf. 7:13. *Verse 6. Like Shiloh;* cf. 7:12-14. *A curse to all nations,* i.e. to make it an example which their enemies will use in their maledictions on their enemies. A contrast to Genesis 12:3.

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3. Thus the meaning of the tumultuous verses in chapter 7:3-15 are revealed to us in their historical setting and in their relation to the spiritual development of Jeremiah. No more eloquent words ever fell from the lips of Old Testament prophet than these. The intensity of them remains. The awful, telling

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[5] See chapters 19:14-20:6.

effect of them as they fell upon the ears of those Temple worshipers it is not difficult for us to imagine. It was probably the first time that he had openly predicted the destruction of both Temple and holy city. We picture Jeremiah in the grip of his intense inspiration, pronouncing this terrific condemnation of religious hypocrisy and this unprecedented prediction of national disaster, and even at this distance, we hold our breath. The Temple has become the symbol of a false religion, and God has determined to make away with it. The City has become corrupt and full of abomination, and God has determined to destroy it also. "And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim" (7:15). There is only one scene in the Bible which can match this. It is that which describes the wrath of Jesus in the Temple on the eve of His Passion. And that Jesus must have had this passage in the life of His great forerunner in mind, seems to be proved from the fact that He quotes the words of Jeremiah as He also cleanses the Temple (St. Matthew 21:13, Jeremiah 7:11).

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The text of Jeremiah 7:1-15 presents few difficulties. *Verse 1. The gate.* In 26:2 we read the *court.* "Probably one of the gates between the outer and the inner court is meant." Without doubt Jeremiah chose a fast or a festival occasion when the outer court would be thronged. *Verse 6. The stranger,* i.e. the immigrant, exposed to ill treatment and therefore entitled to special consideration. *Verse 9.* This enumeration of sins reflects the Decalogue. *Verse 12,* cf. Psalm 78:60. Shiloh's supremacy lay in its possession of the Ark. *Verse 15.* "The old conception of [Jehovah] as localized in Palestine colors the expression in this prediction of the exile. Ephraim is here used of the Northern tribes generally."[6]

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4. The effect of this astonishing address of Jeremiah is described for us in chapter 26:7-24. Apparently Jeremiah was heard without interruption to the end. There is nothing surprising about that. He was known to be a prophet and at first his words were listened to with the respect due to a prophet. Denunciation of sin and threat of punishment were as much in order then as they would be to-day from the lips of a revival preacher, and they would be as little resented. It was not till the close of the address that Jeremiah departed from the conventional rôle of the prophet, and then, without doubt, they were too much stunned by what Jeremiah said to make any reply. But the silence was ominous. For to predict the destruction of both Temple and City was not only an act of high treason, it was also sheer blasphemy. It violated not only the patriotic instincts of the people, but also their deepest religious prejudices: that Jehovah would defend His holy City, and cause His people to be victorious over His enemies. In a word, Jeremiah directly contradicted and denied that dogma of the inviolability of Zion which, as we have seen, since the days of Isaiah had been the deepest religious conviction of the people.

No wonder, then, when he had finished, that the priests and the rank and file of the prophets, who echoed the conventional ideas of the day, declared that Jeremiah was worthy of death. The princes, members of the royal house and other high officials, hear-

[6] A. S. Peake, ibid., Vol. I, p. 149.

ing the tumult, hurried to the "new gate," and there the religious leaders made their formal accusation against Jeremiah (verses 10-11). A similar accusation was made centuries later against Jesus by Scribe and Pharisee (St. Luke 21:6, St. Matthew 26:61), and still later by the Sanhedrin against Stephen (Acts 6:11).

In his reply, Jeremiah added to the seriousness of his offense by deliberately claiming that his unpatriotic and blasphemous utterance had been inspired by God Himself. Jeremiah well knew in making this claim what the effect would be upon his hearers. And there are few more heroic episodes in history than this. The words with which he closes rank with the noblest utterances of which we have record (verses 14-15). One will compare them with Amos 7:10-17, with Daniel 3:17, 18, and with the words of St. Paul in Acts 20:24, and the whole episode with Acts 21:40-22:1-29.

The manner of Jeremiah's escape has been a matter of considerable conjecture. Various attempts have been made to amend the text and thus secure what seems like a consistent account of what happened.[7] The story as it stands, however, seems reasonable enough. The immediate effect of Jeremiah's bold defense was so irresistible, its accent of sincerity was so convincing, that it resulted in a reversal of the previous judgment, and a downright acquittal. In justification of this new attitude, someone cited the case of the prophet Micah (Micaiah the Morashtite, see Micah 1:1, 3:12). Later, however, when there may have been some return of hostile feeling toward Jeremiah, and, it may be, some of the people had even attempted to lay hands on him, a man by the name of

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[7] See Skinner, ibid., p. 172, footnote.

Ahikam, the son of Shaphan (verse 24), stepped forward and spirited Jeremiah away before any bodily harm could be done to him. Psychologically, that seems a perfectly sound account of what may have happened, and it follows exactly on the record as we have it. There are scores of cases in history when men, in peril of their lives, by sheer acts of bravery have won a verdict which could hardly have been secured in any other way. This is only the first of several "miraculous" escapes of Jeremiah. The Lord took care of him, and saw to it that he should continue his intrepid career till his work was done.

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*26:16.* The princes and the people seem to have a more humane outlook than the ecclesiastical authorities. History furnishes many parallels. *Verse 17. Elders of the land.* Possibly the official heads of families, but more likely older people from the country districts familiar with the tradition concerning Micah whose prophecies were uttered about a century earlier. This is one of the very few references to the earlier prophets to be found in later prophetic literature. Jeremiah himself does not mention any of the prophets with whose writings he was familiar, and in turn is not mentioned by any of his successors, notably Ezekiel, although they were profoundly influenced by them. *Verse 18. Mountain of the house,* i.e. Mount Zion on the summit of which the Temple was built. *Verse 19.* This result of Micah's preaching is known to us only by this reference. There is no reason to doubt its accuracy. *Intreat the favor,* lit. "smooth the face," placate; cf. Zechariah 7:2, 8:21, 22; Malachi 1:9. *Verse 20.* This episode is inserted to show how great was the risk which Jeremiah ran.

We know nothing more about Uriah than what we learn here. How it was Jeremiah escaped the king's wrath to which Uriah fell a victim, we do not know. It may have been due to the very boldness of Jeremiah which had its roots in his utter moral sincerity, his deep moral conviction. *Verse 23.* "Extradition was apparently a well recognized feature of international politics" (Peake). *Verse 24.* Ahikam and Achbor (verse 22) and possibly Shaphan had been members of the deputation to Huldah after the discovery of the Book of the Law. 2 Kings 22:14. Ahikam was the father of Gedaliah (40:6) of whom we shall hear later.

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4. 7:16-20. Thus closes the account of this dramatic and critical episode in the career of Jeremiah. The reader, however, may be somewhat bewildered by pausing at the fifteenth verse of chapter 7. Is not the sixteenth verse closely connected with it? Why do we stop so abruptly? An examination of the text shows that in the sixteenth verse, the Lord Himself is the speaker. This is a distinct interruption of the sermon, and could not have been uttered by Jeremiah himself, unless we are disposed to imagine that, as a part of his address, the prophet told the people that the Lord had instructed him not to make intercession for them. This seems rather far-fetched, and therefore it is possible that we have here, what we come across frequently in the book, the insertion of material which formed no part of the original address. The reference to the Queen of Heaven (verse 18) tends to confirm this conclusion. For while we have evidence that this particular form of idolatry was practiced earlier during the days of Manasseh and later,

toward the end of the Southern Kingdom, there is nothing to show that it was among the evils which disgraced the reign of Jehoiakim. The passage may well be by Jeremiah himself. But, if it does not belong here, we have no clue as to its date. It may describe the evil state of things during the period before the Reformation, or it may be among the latest of Jeremiah's prophecies. The text presents no difficulties.

5. 7:21-34. This section contains important material. It has not been included as a part of the Temple sermon, for, as we shall see, there are good reasons for believing that it marks a still later stage in the evolution of Jeremiah's religious ideas. The section is considered here, however, because it deals with the same subject, and because its date must remain a matter of conjecture.

In this passage Jeremiah not only sweeps aside as religiously worthless the whole sacrificial system, but he expressly denies that that system formed any part of the original Mosaic legislation, or of the early religious practice of the Hebrew people. "This passage is famous for its bearing upon the criticism of the Pentateuch," since upon it is based the theory that the Priestly Code, as it is known, is the latest of the documents out of which the Pentateuch was formed. This conclusion has been vigorously contested, but it is difficult to contradict this plain statement of Jeremiah. How could he have made it if his hearers knew all the time that he was saying it, that the sacrificial system had been instituted by Moses and had been a part of their religious life ever since?[8]

Of course the denunciation of a superstitious form of sacrifice had been a familiar feature of prophetic preaching from the first.[9] It is the burden of the message of Amos with whom Hebrew prophecy enters upon its glorious career (Amos 4:4, 5:4ff., 5:21-25). Isaiah condemns the Temple ritual with equal vehemence (Isaiah 1:11-15) and both Hosea and Micah continue in the same strain (Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8). In these utterances, the Hebrew prophets raise the meaning of religion far above the heathen level where the sacrifice of animals either to placate the anger of the deity or to insure communion with him was the central fact, without which all relationship between God and man would cease. In the earlier prophets, however, it is not wholly clear whether they were protesting against sacrifices as such, or merely against a superstitious reliance upon sacrifice which made righteousness of life an unnecessary part of their religion. It is true that Amos and Hosea point to the forty years in the wilderness when there were no sacrifices as the ideal period in Hebrew history, the inference being that if the people could know and serve God then without sacrifices, they could do so still. Yet nowhere in the earlier prophets is this repudiation of sacrifice as a real part of a true religion so clear and explicit as in this passage from Jeremiah. These verses taken by themselves stamp Jeremiah as the most spiritual of the prophets. He denies that Jehovah ever instituted sacrifice at all, that He has any desire, any use for it. "The whole system, and all laws prescribing it or regulating it, are declared to be outside the revelation on which the national religion of Israel was based." Jeremiah does not attempt to explain how the idea of sacrifice had become embedded so firmly in the mind of the people—although the inference is that it was the result of contact with their heathen neighbors. But he does declare that it is not a real part of the faith which had been delivered to the fathers, and he defies the long tradition and the deep-seated religious prejudices of the people when he declares that it was not commanded by God, was not a part of their religious heritage, and must be swept away before the people could know and practice a real religion of the spirit. Let anyone read and ponder the significance of these tremendous verses, and he will come to feel that of all the Old Testament prophets, it is Jeremiah who most nearly approximates in his conception of the nature of real religion the Prophet of Nazareth who said: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (St. John 4:24, 25).

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[8] For a full discussion of this, see A. S. Peake, ibid., Vol. I, pp. 152-3.

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[9] See Skinner, ibid., pp. 178-184.

These epoch-making verses probably formed the subject of a second address, delivered in the same place at a later time.[10] A reason for believing that this may be a later address is that the enunciation of this principle that sacrifice forms no part of the religion of Israel, means that Jeremiah has finally reached the point of denying "the claim of Deuteronomy to be a Divine law imposed on Israel." For while Deuteronomy does not declare that God instituted sacrifices at the time of the Exodus, it does declare that He did so in Moab forty years later. And if Jeremiah repudiated the first idea, he must have repudiated the second also. For while the sacrificial element is not prominent in Deuteronomy, it is there; and it is there, according to the Book, by Divine commandment and institution. But Jeremiah here takes the high and final ground that all such legislation whether in Deuteronomy or out of it, was an "unauthorized addition to the covenant made with the fathers." With the ethical laws of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah remains in sympathy. It is when he comes to consider even these as superseded in the gradual evolution of his religious ideas (31:31-34) that Jeremiah attains his highest altitude as a prophet of the Spirit.

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[10] If George Adam Smith is correct in his conjecture that in chapters 7:1-15 and 26 we have the report of two Temple addresses, this would be the third in the series.

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*Chapter 7:24. They.* The reference is to the fathers in the wilderness. Contrast 2:2. *Verse 30.* The reference is to the idolatries practiced especially during Manasseh's reign. 2 Kings 21:2-9; 23:4-14. *Verse 31. Topheth.* For the history of this word, consult Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible.* Its etymology and meaning are unknown. It seems to mean "fireplace"; cf. Isaiah 30:33. Human sacrifice, a heathen custom abhorrent to the Hebrews, was practiced during Manasseh's reign. The victims were killed before they were burned. The sanctuary for such abominations was in the valley of Hinnom (verse 32), the N. T. Gehenna (see Isaiah 66:24) which appropriately supplied the name by which hell came to be designated. The last clause in this verse would seem to be superfluous. But the Law demanded that the first-born be consecrated to the Lord (Exodus 13:2, 22:29[b], 34:19) and these passages may have been misinterpreted (cf. also Ezekiel 20:25, 26).

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We have been able to trace at least four stages in the evolution of Jeremiah's attitude toward the Great Reform and the Book of the Laws (Deuteronomy). At first, he was enthusiastically in favor of the Reform and went on a preaching mission in its support (11:1-8). Later, during the quiet years at Jerusalem, observing how little effect it seemed to have on the morals of the people, and how it tended to substitute ritualistic observance for ethical conduct, he became critical and even frankly skeptical of its value (chapter 11:15-16). Still later, when, in the reign of Jehoiakim, a superstitious reverence for the Temple worship had completely obscured all other aspects of the Deuteronomic reform, he denounced it in the great Temple sermon, predicting the destruction of both Temple and City (7:1-15). Finally, and at just what moment in his career we do not know, he broke completely from the idea that Deuteronomy had any Divine authority behind it, by declaring that the whole sacrificial system has no place in the religion which Jehovah had taught, and their fathers had practiced (7:21-34). There remained, however, Jeremiah's respect for the ethical precepts of Deuteronomy which doubtless had first place in the minds of its authors.

The problem which Jeremiah had to face in his attitude toward Deuteronomy and the Great Reform has confronted all true prophets of a spiritual religion, and all spiritually minded men and women whether they are prophets or not. On the one hand, there is the spiritual Idea to which deepest religious impulses bear witness; but on the other hand there is the incorporation of this Idea in religious institutions, in churches, in ecclesiastical forms and conventions. Many people to-day distinguish sharply between the two. They do believe in religion as a spirit, but they do not believe in that embodiment of religion which they find in the churches. They are inclined to agree with Mr. Wells:

> The history of Christianity, with its encrustation and suffocation in dogmas and usages, its dire prosecutions of the faithful by the unfaithful, its dessication and its unlovely decay, its invasion by robes and rites and all the tricks and vices of the Pharisees whom Christ denounced, is full of warning against the dangers of a church.[11]

Others may not go so far. But they agree in this, that they do not recognize the need of the church in their own lives. There is no mistaking the fact that

> the general modern judgment is adverse to institutionalism in religion. In spite of the enormous improvement in the average ecclesiastical attitude and in the average church service compared with a hundred years ago, the sense that religion involves the [acceptance] of the rules and discipline of an unorganized society; that definite spiritual gains are attached to incorporation in such a society; that church-going and formal corporate worship is a normal or necessary part of a good life, has weakened and actually ceased in multitudes of thoughtful people.[12]

Religion is conceived of as a solitary affair. And they find the endeavor to embody these solitary experiences of the soul in visible and corporate form neither attractive nor helpful. Consequently they let the churches alone.

In justification of this attitude they point to the great prophets of the Spirit like Jeremiah who denounced corporate religious practice just because he himself saw the meaning and value of a truly personal and spiritual religion. They discover that everything that Jeremiah had to urge against the Temple worship of his day can, with much show of reason, be applied to church conditions in our own day. Thus multitudes of people who are both spiritually minded and ethically in earnest are outside of all forms of corporate religious worship and activity.

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[11] *God the Invisible King.*

[12] E. Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day,* pp. 156-7.

The problem, however, whether we view it either from the point of view of history, or of the needs of the individual or of society, is not really so easily solved. From the point of view of history, solitariness has turned out to be an illusion. Everywhere in the history of religion there is indeed the solitary experience of sage and seer and prophet, but side by side with it there is also the tendency to organize into communities and societies living under sanctions and rules. Now these two tendencies all through history act and react upon each other. The religious community and organization tend to become formal and official. The spirit of religion tends to leave them. Then the great and arresting religious personalities either revolt from them or attempt to re-form and rekindle them from within. Now, what deduction is to be drawn from this broad and permanent history?[13] Is it not this: that both must be essential to what we call the religious needs of humanity? It is a truism that religious institutions tend to degenerate, to become mechanical, to tyrannize. But, and this is the point that is not generally admitted, is it not equally a truism that without the stabilizing and preservative influence of religious institutions, the religion of pure spirit would tend to evaporate or at least would fail to condense in forms of practical spiritual energy?

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[13] These paragraphs are taken from the author's *The Christian Church in the Modern World,* pp. 19-21. The reader is referred to the entire chapter II of that publication.

Does not religion, if it is to be a real, permanent and effective form of spiritual influence, need to be rooted in the past, have acquired traditions and habits? If religious history proves that institutions tend to go stale, it also proves that the spiritual life does not flourish in an atmosphere of pure freedom: that unless the free movement toward novelty, and the fresh levels of pure experience are balanced by the stability given by hoarded tradition and habits, it will degenerate into eccentricity and fail of full effect. The spirit of religion, that is, demands some incarnation, some place in history, some social outlet, some fixed discipline and tradition. The careful student of history will discover that the history of the soul has two sides: solitary vision or revelation, and some incorporation of that vision in the actual life of the world. It will seem therefore to him that both advocates of individual and of corporate religion are right. And that if his own religious experience is to be normal, it will include them both. No one will deny that the protest of Jeremiah against religious formalism, religious superstition and religious hypocrisy was merited and necessary. But no student of Hebrew history will deny also that unless the splendid oracles of the Hebrew prophets had been incorporated in the synagogue in the Law, in the Sabbath, in a word in the institutions of a later Judaism, they would never have survived the centuries of intervening persecution and been preserved inviolate unto the day of Jesus Christ. The work of Jeremiah was indeed essential, but it was not all that was essential. Jesus Himself seems to have realized this by giving His steady allegiance to the religious institutions of His day. Those in our own day who are doing the most for the cause of religion are neither the religious individualists on the one hand who remain aloof from any support of the institutions of religion; nor religious institutionalists who substitute the forms of religion for pure personal devotion, and downright ethical living. They are those who combine the purest forms of personal religion and social service with loyalty to those religious institutions which enshrine and preserve from age to age the spirit of religion of which they are the outward and necessarily imperfect embodiment.

# CHAPTER XI

## JEREMIAH AND JEHOIAKIM

## II

Date, 608-604 B.C. Chapters 8:1-13; 17:1-4; 9:10-22; 10:17-25; 9:23-26; 21:13-14; 13:15-17; 46; 25; 47; 48; 49; 13:20-27; 45; 36; 12:7-17; 35; 22:20-23; 17:5-8.

Of course, after his Temple sermon, Jeremiah was a marked man. He had now incurred the bitter hatred of both political and ecclesiastical leaders. He had not hesitated to predict the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the nation's enemies, and thus he had been guilty of treason in the eyes of the state. And he had not hesitated to declare not only that the Temple should be destroyed, but that the whole sacrificial system was worthless in the eyes of God. He was therefore guilty of blasphemy as well. There is a close parallel in all of this between the career of Jeremiah and that of Jesus, which will not escape the attention of the Bible student. It was precisely at these two points that Jesus came into conflict with the political and religious leaders of His day.

It is not apparent that Jeremiah was deterred by his narrow escape from death, after preaching the Temple sermon, from continuing to denounce the evils which were rampant during the days of Jehoiakim. When he received his commission, he was told (chapter 1:17 A.V.) not to be dismayed at their faces. And he was not dismayed. The two chapters following the account of the Temple address are filled with this bold condemnation of the course of king and priests and people. We must imagine that he did not stay long in hiding after the sensation which he had produced, but soon began to preach openly in the streets and to pronounce the sure doom which would befall the nation. This becomes, from now on, the burden of his preaching. The wonder is, that he was permitted to go about, unmolested, saying what he did. The explanation, aside from Divine Providence, is that he was protected by the reverence in which all prophets were held, and in addition by the tremendous impression which his sincerity and courage made upon the people. The king and the priests, in a word, were more afraid of him than he was of them. Yet, as we shall see, Jeremiah was not to be spared the persecutions which befall all true prophets of the Spirit, at the hands of secular and ecclesiastical authority.

In chapters 8, 9, and 10, we find the record of this continued denunciation of the people and of their rulers. The reader may weary of these reiterated complaints of Jeremiah. This impression will be increased rather than lessened as the book goes on, as there is no interruption in his indictment of the sins of the people, down to the very end of it. But if we weary of it, Jeremiah did not. His indignation was not temporary, and his anger against sin knew no end. He is as hot against it at the close of his forty years preaching as at the beginning of it. Just here, we detect the moral difference between such a man and ourselves. We know what it is to flare up against evil, but we also know what it is to have our wrath die down. Evildoers can count upon this. They know that all they have to do is to lie low for a time until the wave of popular wrath has passed, and then they can begin again. The reason, Dr. Parkhurst once said, why the world does not get better any faster, is that good people get tired of being good sooner than bad people get tired of being bad. But Jeremiah never got tired. We may get tired reading what he had to say, but he did not get tired saying it.

Another difficulty which the reader will find in this preaching of Jeremiah is in its emotional passages (13:17, 14:17). It is not a picture that appeals to us. We do not like to see a preacher weep in the pulpit to-day, and we are not attracted by the tearfulness of Jeremiah in his day. If the man had made fewer references to his mournful state of mind, we should better enjoy reading what he has to say.

The reader, however, who desires to be just toward Jeremiah, will make allowance for the difference between oriental and occidental moods and manners. He will remember that the oriental to-day, as well as in Jeremiah's day, is habitually more frank in showing his emotions than we of the West. The Bible is filled with passages in which heroes like Moses and David, and heroines like Hannah and Naomi, gave free course to emotion. If the Bible reader will turn to his concordance and look up the words "weep" and "wept" and see for himself of whom they were used, he will be inclined to modify his opinion that the term "weeping" can be applied to Jeremiah any more than to any other considerable personage in the Old Testament.

In the next place, after one has assembled every passage in Jeremiah of this sort, he will find how few they are in comparison to the number which give us a picture of a very different sort. It is strange that the comparatively few passages which describe Jeremiah in tears should have pictured the man for coming generations, instead of the many passages which show him the lion-hearted preacher and prophet confronting without flinching the most terrible odds, and uttering without fear or favor a message that was bound to place him in constant peril of his life.

> Gentle and refined he was, but neither timid nor tearful. Sympathetic, alert, courageous, he is the Invincible Saint of the Old Testament with the force of the Hammer (23:29) and the consuming power of the Flame, and the inflexible strength of the Iron Column.[1]

Again, one will recall the terrible demand which duty made of Jeremiah. It is a point to which we will return later. As we have seen, Jeremiah was a man of deep sensibilities, and an ardent lover of his country and of his people. If he had been a man of rougher nature, less sensitive and refined, his course would have been far easier. Being what he was, however, the demand that he should pronounce the death sentence on the land of his birth, on the people of his own ancestry, on the nation of which he was fond and proud, could only mean the deepest pain, the most poignant suffering. This, and not outward persecution, was the heaviest cross which Jeremiah had to bear. At times, it seemed to him to be intolerable. It is then that his strength gives way, that his personal grief overwhelms him, that he cries out against God who had appointed him to so terrible a task. From this point of view, the passages which the superficial and undiscerning reader dislikes, indicate the real depth and intensity of the nature of Jeremiah. It is always those who feel most deeply who can act most boldly.

A third difficulty which confronts the reader of these denunciations of Jeremiah is of an opposite sort.

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[1] Longacre, *A Prophet of the Spirit,* p. 43.

How unfeeling they appear to be! How stern and uncompromising! How ruthless and brutal! One reads such verses as 8:1-2, 10, 17; 9:9-11, 25, 26, and turns away in dismay if not in disgust. What shall we think of a man who can spend his time saying such things as these? And these are only samples. All through the book we come across passages which are as bad, or worse. We come to feel that Jeremiah is not justified in continuing to talk like this. We do not blame the people for resenting it. We feel that it must have been an intolerable nuisance to have a man around who kept saying that the land would be turned into a dungheap and that vultures would get fat on their dead bodies. We begin to feel about Jeremiah the way the people did. The very word "jeremiad" has been coined to describe an unwarranted pessimism: a dark and dismal forecast that has no warrant in fact.

This judgment is one which every true prophet of the Spirit has to meet. This condemnation and reproach he must bear. It is a very part of his calling. He cannot evade or escape it. Again, we find a parallel in the career of Jesus. Nothing that Jeremiah had to say about Jerusalem exceeds in intensity the utterances of Jesus (cf. St. Matthew 23:13-33). Many readers of the Gospels have had difficulty in reconciling these dynamic and damnatory words of Jesus with the "sweetness and light" which is characteristic of most of His teaching. The two do not seem to hang together. This anger and vituperation do not seem to be Christlike.

The fact, however, that they are both there, causes us to inquire if we have not mistaken the nature of goodness; if there must not be blood and iron as well as sweetness and light in the character that morally we call perfect; whether the love of good does not mean a corresponding hatred of evil; whether the more one loves God, he will not hate whatever offends or contradicts the goodness of God. The wrath of Jesus, from this point of view, is simply the inevitable corollary of His love. Proportionately as He loved the souls of men, He hated and loathed the evil which desecrated them. A sure test of the hunger after righteousness is the range and capacity of moral indignation.

It is this test which our own more flaccid and complacent spirits are unable to meet. We turn away from these denunciations, finding them hard and unfeeling, precisely because our own feelings for truth and righteousness are so soft. If we had a tithe of Jeremiah's passionate love of truth, desire for social justice, and longing for a righteousness of the heart, we would be filled as he was filled with a passionate hatred of their moral opposite. Doubtless Jeremiah clothed his hatred of evil in language which is distasteful to us. So did all the other Old Testament prophets. But here again the trouble is more with us than with them. It would be good for our morals if we should use some language like this. Language has more to do with morals than we often imagine. A person who is fastidious in the language which he uses about sin is likely to lose the edge of his indignation against it. If we used rougher words about sin and its consequences, we should be in a healthier moral condition than many of us are. No one can read the lives of the saints without coming across passages which closely resemble these diatribes of Jeremiah. Precisely because these men walk close to God, they abominate human wrongdoing as a stench in His nostrils.

In addition to this, it needs to be said that again and again in the book of Jeremiah, after an outpouring of the vials of his wrath, we have what closely resembles a heartbreak. When the passion of denunciation has passed, his humanness appears. Let the reader turn to chapter 20:7-12, and he will find that what wounds the sensibilities of the reader, wounded the heart of Jeremiah still more. He had to say what he did. He would have been untrue to his calling if he had not. But he took no delight in what he said. We are not dealing with a man who gloated over the ruin that he predicted. He predicted it, and then he wrung his hands over the doom that his lips had pronounced.

It is unfortunate, also, that the reader of the English Bible is not able, in these chapters, to detect the nobility of Jeremiah's writing. The poems to be found in these chapters rise to such heights of poetical expression in striking imagery and moving emotion, that competent literary critics have not hesitated to declare that they belong to the finest poetry in the world.[2] The reader should endeavor to discover this for himself by using the translations to be found, for example, in George Adam Smith's *Jeremiah,* pp. 198-206. He can hardly fail to be moved and stirred by the power and pathos of these poems.

We bring together, in this general section, certain passages in which Jeremiah denounces the evils of Jehoiakim's reign.

1. Chapter 8:1-13. The first three verses of chapter 8 connect closely with the preceding verse of

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[2] See J. A. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament in Its Historical Development,* p. 149.

chapter 7, and may have been a part of that discourse. With verse 4, a new oracle begins, which we have assigned to an earlier period.[3] Verses 10-12 are practically identical with 6:13-15, and they are here an editorial insertion. This leaves us only verses 9 and 13. These two verses connect well with each other and may well be a short prophecy belonging to this period. Verse 13 reminds us of St. Matthew 21:19.

2. In Chapter 17:1-4[4] we have a significant passage dealing with the nature of sin which may well belong to this period. It indicates Jeremiah's deepening conception of sin as an ingrained and ineradicable principle. Sin is something which is graven on the heart. The prophet is convinced that neither reform measures on the one hand, nor moral suasion on the other, will serve to put away the evil which has become a kind of infection poisoning the moral nature of the people. Thus we are prepared for the only possible solution

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[3] See chapter VIII, p. 107.

[4] Chapters 16 and 17 present every kind of difficulty. They are not dated. Only internal evidence can decide to what periods of Jeremiah's life the different sections belong. We seem to have included in these chapters miscellaneous short prophecies uttered on different occasions. Moreover it is a grave question how much of these chapters belong to Jeremiah himself. 16:10-13, 16-18, may be by Jeremiah, but like 5:19-31, which it parallels, it reads much more like a scribe's imitation of Deuteronomy, and verses 14-15 are a duplicate of 23:7-8, where the thought is in harmony with the context; 15:21 is so reminiscent of Ezekiel that it probably assumed its present form under his influence; 17:12-13 are not only not connected with their context but repeat 2:13 and 14:8; 17:18 contradicts verse 16 sharply, and is too imprecatory to be credited to Jeremiah at all; and 17:19-27 puts an emphasis on ritual observance out of harmony with Jeremiah's thought, and teaches, as Jeremiah could not have taught, that Judah's fate depends upon a continued observance of the Sabbath. Of the remaining sections, 16:1-9 we have placed in the early days of Jeremiah's life in Jerusalem; 16:19-20, 17:9, 10, 14-17, we find a place for in our study of the Soul of Jeremiah; 17:1-8 is discussed in this chapter; and 17:11 is a short detached proverb standing by itself.

of the moral problem, a solution which carries us to the heights of Jeremiah's inspiration and as near to the New Testament as in any other portion of the Old Testament prophecy.

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*Verse 1. Pen of iron,* a chisel used to cut inscriptions.[5] The diamond point is needed because of the hardness of Judah's heart. *Verse 2. Whilst*=so that. The text is corrupt but the meaning may be: "So that their children will remember." Guilt so inherent in the blood will be transmitted to the next generation. *Asherim.* Sacred posts erected beside an altar (Deuteronomy 16:21), often regarded as symbols of a goddess. *Verses 3, 4.* A parallel passage is found in 15:14.

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Chapters 9 and 10 of the book of Jeremiah present us with one of those interesting puzzle-passages with which, presumably, the reader has now become familiar. The arrangement of the material in these chapters may roughly be described as follows: (1) Chapter 9, verse 1, belongs to the preceding section, 8:14-23. (2) Chapter 9, verses 2-9, we have considered as one of the possible passages dating from Jeremiah's quiet years at Jerusalem.[6] (3) Chapter 9, verses 10-22, belong to the period which we are now studying, and therefore are to be read directly after 17:1-4. (4) Following 9:22, we must place 10:17-25. (5) Chapter 9, verses 23-24, and chapter 9, verses 25-26, contain little separate prophecies belonging to this general period. (6) Chapter 10, verses 1-16, are not by Jeremiah at all, and belong to the material added to the prophet's authentic messages by later hands.[7] At this point, therefore, the reader will consider first 9:10-22, then 10:17-25, and finally 9:23-26.

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[5] See Job 19:24.

[6] See p. 111.

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3. Chapter 9:10-22. *Verse 10.* In this verse (cf. 4:23-26) the personal pronoun refers to Jeremiah, in verse 11 to Jehovah. *Verses 12-17* may be an insertion from the pen of another author. Its prose style is in direct contrast with the fine poetical imagery of the verses which precede and follow. *Verse 17. Cunning women,* i.e. who may know something of medicine or magic. *Verse 19.* Since the mourning is out of Zion, the people cannot have forsaken the land. Read "we are forsaking." *Verse 20.* The conventional funeral dirges will not suffice for so great a calamity. New ones must be learned.

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4. Chapter 10:17-25. Here the prophecy is continued where it was interrupted at 9:22. The exile is at hand. Jerusalem will be besieged and must prepare for the worst. The rulers have neglected God, and as a result the people will be scattered, for there is a rumor in the North of a foe advancing to devastate Judah.

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*Verse 17.* The picture is that of an emigrant packing up his bundle to move. The reference to a siege anticipates the event. There is no reason, as the rest of the section proves, for thinking that it has already taken place. *Verse 18. Feel.* The Hebrew is "find" which makes the meaning of the verse somewhat uncertain. *Verse 19.* It is uncertain whether Jeremiah is the speaker, or the people. The following verses point to the people. *Verse 20. Tent,* i.e. the land in which the people live. Jeremiah paints the picture from the future. *Verse 21. Shepherds.* See 2:8. *Verse 23.* It is the weakness of man, and not the determination of his way by God which accounts for man's inability to direct his steps aright. *Verse 24. Judgment.* The word here means "in just measure." The plea is against excessive punishment. *Verse 25.* Unhesitatingly we conclude that this verse is not by Jeremiah. He is sure that the "heathen" are also the objects of the wrath of God, but not because "they have eaten up Jacob." On the contrary, he consistently looks upon them as the instrument of God for the punishment of His people. This fact does not lessen their own guilt, neither will it save them from the punishment that awaits them. But they are not guilty as this verse suggests because they have made desolate the land of Judah.

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[7] This section presupposes that the people are living among the heathen and are therefore in exile. Moreover the style of this passage is similar to that of the later prophets of the exile, and is unlike the writing of Jeremiah.

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5. Chapter 9:23-26. Here we find two little detached fragments, evidently out of place where they stand. In verses 23-24 we have a beautiful little word, one of many scattered all through the book, showing us the true and tender religious feeling of the prophet. The same thought is found elsewhere, cf. 8:9, 17:5, 6; 22:13-16. Verses 25, 26 are of a different nature. Except the Philistines, the nations with which the Hebrews came in contact practiced circumcision. But though outwardly circumcised, they are uncircumcised in their hearts ("circumcised in their uncircumcision").

"And all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart." Thus there is no moral distinction between the heathen and Israel (cf. Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2).

6. Chapter 21:13-14. For convenience' sake, these two somewhat enigmatic verses are mentioned here. It is an "obscure and difficult fragment." In general, its tone is in harmony with the passages which we have just traversed. The date, and even the authorship, are uncertain. Furthermore, while Jerusalem is evidently intended, the description is unsuitable, since Jerusalem is on a hill, and not in a valley, and a foe would come up and not down against it. The verses may be a quotation in which another city is referred to, and is here applied to Jerusalem. On the whole, it seems more natural to assume that it is a fragment of a prophecy of Jeremiah.

7. Another short prophecy probably belonging to this period is that contained in 13:15-17. It may well have been part of the roll of prophecies that was destroyed by Jehoiakim. The prophet calls upon the people to listen to the Lord's voice, and to give Him the glory before the darkness shuts in round about them. But if the people will not hear, then the prophet will be overborne with grief at the captivity which awaits them.

These passages, it will be observed, are all in the same strain. They presuppose the same situation: the deep moral and political and religious degradation of the nation during Jehoiakim's reign. Jeremiah confronts it with mounting indignation and condemns it with unflinching courage. But, in the midst of his invective, one detects the poignant sorrow of a heart that is burdened and broken by the sin which it feels unable either to alter or to cure, because that sin seems inborn, innate, a very instinct and inalienable habit of the soul. In one inspired utterance [8] Jeremiah sees the solution of this problem. God will give Israel a new heart and engrave His law upon it. But it is precisely at this point, in its inability to find a solution to the problem of sin, that the Old Testament falls short of the New, and Jeremiah is seen to be a forerunner of Jesus Christ. The uniqueness of the Gospel lies in its confident proclamation: "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

We arrive now at a fateful year in the history of the Southern Kingdom—a turning point in the career of Jeremiah. Jehoiakim had reigned for four years, practically a vassal of Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, who after the battle of Megiddo in 608 B. C. had succeeded in extending his empire nearly to the Euphrates on the borders of Babylonia. But the Egyptians were not long to retain their conquered territory. In 607 B. C. Nineveh fell before the attacks of the Medes and Babylonians, and the Great Empire of Assyria had at length come to an end. Syria and Palestine were taken over by the Babylonians, who challenged the right of Egypt to these provinces. Accordingly, Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nobopolassar the king of the Babylonians, advanced against the Egyptians. The issue was fought out at the battle of Carchemish in the year 605 B. C., and resulted in a crushing defeat of the Egyptians. As a result of this battle, Palestine was to be for centuries under the control of the Eastern powers.[9]

[8] Chapter 31:31-34.

[9] See 2 Kings 24:7.

The advance of Nebuchadnezzar was, however, delayed by the death of his father. A few years were to elapse before he could establish himself upon the throne and complete the conquest which he had begun. Accordingly, a treaty was made with Necho, whereby the Egyptians retained their independence, but the intervening provinces of Syria and Palestine came under the jurisdiction of the Babylonians.

It is easy for us to sense the tremendous impression which this event made upon the mind of Jeremiah. For long his eyes had been fastened upon the North as the instrument of God for the punishment of His people. Now he saw, unfolding itself before his eyes, the terrible outlines of the drama which he knew was to be enacted. From now on Babylonia meant for Jeremiah the Scourge of God which was to make of the Temple a ruin, of the City an ash heap, of the people a vagrant and all but hopeless band of exiles.

Jeremiah has given to us in chapter 46 a graphic description of that battle and its meaning for Judah and Egypt. And in the three following chapters he has pointed out the results of the victory of Nebuchadnezzar upon the fortunes of the surrounding nations, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon and Edom, with whom, since the beginning of their history in Canaan, the Hebrews had been in closest contact. The scholars have been much concerned over these chapters. They have not known whether to assign them to Jeremiah or not. That Jeremiah could not prophesy about Jerusalem at all without also prophesying about the nations seems clear enough.[10] But in the minds of many, there are serious objections to the notion that Jeremiah wrote these prophecies. For one thing, it

[10] See chapter V, pp. 60f.

has been urged that their tone is vindictive. But so is the tone of Nahum and of Habakkuk and of many of the Psalms. And, as George Adam Smith has shown,[11] this idea of Divine vengeance is not essentially political or nationalistic. It is directed against the heathen nations as the symbol of that irreligion to which the mind of the prophets is unalterably opposed. Again, it is objected that there is no call to repentance in these chapters. But we need to remember that we must wait for the very late book of Jonah before the evangelistic idea dawned upon the conscience of Israel that the heathen nations were capable of repentance. The absence of any direct reference to Judah in these chapters would be surprising if the prophet had not already thoroughly dealt with these matters of purely domestic concern. It is not necessary to conclude from all of this that these chapters were written by Jeremiah from beginning to end. They may very well have been worked over and enlarged from his own briefer and authentic oracles.[12]

8. Chapter 46. In chapter 46, we have a graphic account of the battle of Carchemish and its results. It consists of two main divisions: (a) verses 2-12, (b) verses 14-28. The first section has to do with the preparations for the battle and its dire outcome for the Egyptians. The second is a general prophecy against Egypt itself.[13] In the first section, Jeremiah plunges without introduction into the midst of things. He pictures the night before the battle, and the prepa-

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[11] See his "Habakkuk" and "Nahum" in *Expositor's Bible.*

[12] It is not proposed here to attempt any analysis. For this, the reader is referred to the commentary of Peake where a detailed discussion will be found, Vol. 2, pp. 212-253.

[13] It is possible that the second section belongs to a much later date. This is by no means certain, however.

rations made by the contending armies. Then follows a description of the discomfiture of the Egyptians, and in verse 10 an outburst of vengeance which is not so difficult to understand, when we remember that only a few years before, the Egyptians had slain Josiah, carried away Jehoahaz into exile, and put the wicked Jehoiakim on the throne.

The second section is in general a dirge over Egypt whose ruin is foretold and described.

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*Verse 3. Buckler.* "A small rounded shield; the shield is the long shield which protected the whole body" (Peake). *Verse 5.* The meaning is: "Wherefore do I see them to be dismayed?" *Verse 8.* Since the rising of the Nile never does damage, the expression implies the futile and hollow pretensions of Egypt. *Verse 9.* Probably a continuation of Pharaoh's words. *Cush* is Ethiopia; *Put,* a land near the Red Sea. *Verse 12,* cf. Leviticus 26:37. *Verse 14.* Migdal and Tahpanhes (Daphne) are towns on the highroad from Asia into Egypt. Noph is probably Memphis, the capital of lower Egypt (2:16). *Verse 15.* The LXX gives us the correct reading of this verse: "Why is Apis (the sacred bull) fled? Thy strong one stood not because the Lord did thrust him down." *Verses 16, 17.* The reading and sense of these verses is not wholly clear. *Verse 18.* The foe which advances upon Egypt will overtop all other victors. Nebuchadnezzar is meant. *Verses 22, 23.* These are obscure verses. They seem to mean that the retreat of Egypt, or the moan of Egypt is inaudible. *Verses 27, 28.* These verses are also found in 30:10, 11, and are doubtless an insertion here.

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9. Chapter 25. If, in chapter 46, we have described to us the emotions of Jeremiah upon hearing of the battle of Carchemish, with all that he felt it portended for the future of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom, in the next chapter presented for our consideration, we have an even fuller account of the prophet's mood as he foresaw the coming doom not only of Jerusalem but of all the surrounding nations. Chapter 25 is dated. This word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, we are told, in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim—the year following the battle of Carchemish.[14] It serves as a sort of prelude to those detailed prophecies "against the nations," and against Judah which must have followed immediately afterward. Indeed, so close is the connection of these subsequent prophecies "against the nations" that the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, inserts them in the middle of this chapter. In the Greek Old Testament, chapters 46-51 are found between verses 13 and 15 of chapter 25. The original Hebrew text of this chapter was probably as we find it in our Bibles to-day. But why, when chapters 46-51 were removed from the chapter, they were relegated to the very end of the book of Jeremiah instead of being placed where they doubtless belong, directly after it, we do not know.

Many scholars have argued against the authenticity of this twenty-fifth chapter, claiming that none of it could have been written by Jeremiah. In part, this is due to their reluctance to believe that Jeremiah had any reason to believe that he had any authority or commission to prophesy concerning any nation except Judah. This argument we have already considered and dismissed. Again it has been urged that in this chapter Jeremiah leaves no room for a possible repentance of the people: an element which is always a part of his message. But such an argument seems strangely shortsighted. Admitting that this chapter was written shortly after the event, what is more natural than that Jeremiah should expect the immediate descent of Nebuchadnezzar upon Jerusalem, which would leave no time or space for repentance. In this chapter he contemplates sudden disaster, and in the excitement and moral passion of this expectancy, he utters this solemn dirge upon the recreant people. As we know, it turned out differently. Nebuchadnezzar was not able to advance to the South at once. The death of his father compelled delay. And with this postponement of judgment the moral tension of the prophet is relaxed, and his later prophecies again admit the possibility through repentance of averting what seemed like sure destruction. We accept the chapter, then, as containing a genuine prophecy of Jeremiah.

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[14] "It is a bold but plausible conjecture that in 25:1-13 we have the conclusion of the volume of prophecies dictated by Jeremiah to Baruch in the year 604." (Skinner, ibid., p. 240.) Verse 13 of chapter 25 leads up to chapter 36 by its reference to a "book" and forms a kind of title to the prophecies against "the nations" which follow immediately in the LXX.

The whole of it, however, does not belong to him. The list of nations in verses 18-26 was doubtless expanded by later hands. And the latter part of the chapter from verses 27 onwards can hardly belong to Jeremiah. Here the drinking of the cup of wrath, which the previous part of the chapter describes as having already taken place, is projected into the future. And the ideas advanced in verses 28, 29 that since Judah was punished, the "nations" cannot be allowed to escape, presupposes a favoritism of Judah to which Jeremiah is a total stranger. These ideas belong to a later age. Also the passage which follows from verse 30 to the end of the chapter is verbose and imitative and contains elements foreign to Jeremiah. The reader therefore may pause with the end of verse 22. The gist of what Jeremiah had to say is included in the preceding section. If any of his writing is included in what follows, it is not necessary to try to recover it.

In this chapter, therefore, Jeremiah reminds the people that for years he had urged them to abandon their evil ways, but they had refused to listen. Therefore the Babylonians will lay their country waste, and their conquerors will be supreme for seventy years. Then Babylonia itself will be punished and other nations will reign over it. As a symbol of this coming judgment, the prophet is told to take the cup of the Lord's fury and make the nations drink of it—and he did, beginning at Jerusalem. His own city is not to be spared. The Lord will roar against Judah, and the noise of the battle will be heard to the ends of the earth. Rulers and princes may well lament, for the land will be ravaged in His anger.

Here is invective at white heat. Here is moral indignation at a high altitude. Here is the soul of Jeremiah at a pitch of uncontrolled and uncontrollable moral anger which finds few parallels in Scripture outside of the book of Revelation. If the reader is inclined to feel that this judgment is too severe in its unmitigated fury to come from the heart of even a prophet of righteousness, let him turn from its reading to chapter 15:10-21, which also belongs to this period, and discover there what such a message meant to the man who delivered it. The inward agony of Jeremiah's experience, as we have repeatedly seen, consisted in the fact that he was sent of God to prophesy to the people whom he loved, and over whom his soul yearned, the inexorable judgment which follows willful and persistent sin. And even in this chapter the feelings of Jeremiah find some solace in the thought that the Babylonia which is to deal this death blow to the people to whom Jeremiah belonged is itself to suffer the same fate.

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*25:1-38.* As throughout the book, the dates and introductory notations belong to later revisers. *Verses 4-7.* It is probable that these verses in the main were also written by a later hand. They repeat in part what has gone before, and insert a call to repentance which is not in harmony with the chapter as a whole. *Verse 8* joins on naturally with verse 4. *Verse 9. My servant,* i.e. the instrument of his wrath. *Verse 11.* The probable meaning is "the people of Judah shall serve among the nations (of the North) seventy years." The words "King of Babylon" were not in the original text. The predicion of a seventy-year exile is also found in chapter 29:10, which was written some years later. We must regard the number "seventy" as a round number, and not take it literally as fixing a precise time limit to the period of the exile. Numbers are frequently used in the Bible in this way, the familiar ones being three, twelve, forty and seventy. See Zechariah 1:12. *Verses 12 and 14* and the words "which Jeremiah had prophesied against all the nations" in verse 13 belong to a later redactor, and should be omitted in the reading. *Verse 15.* We now come to the vision of the wine-cup of the wrath of God. It is a bit of striking imagery. Cf. Isaiah 51:21-23; Revelation 14:10; 16:19. *Verses 18-26.* This long list of nations in its present form cannot belong to Jeremiah. There was probably an original short list, enlarged by later additions. The original list may have included Judah, Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Tema (i.e. Arabian tribes). These verses are therefore passed over without comment. A detailed statement concerning the nations against which Jeremiah does prophesy will be found in the next section. *Verses 27-38*. In view of the grave doubts as to Jeremiah's authorship of this passage, the reader is advised to omit them, and commentary therefore is unneeded.

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10. Chapters 47, 48, 49. These chapters of prophecies against the "nations" all belong together, as we have seen, to the same period as the preceding chapter. These "nations" were not only the political foes of Israel. They had been the implacable enemies of Israel's faith. It had been their heathenism which had caused the moral and religious ruin of the people of God. Their idolatries, their immorality, their seductions, had led Israel astray. The reader of these chapters will lose the whole point of them unless he remembers that what made hot the heart of Jeremiah against them was the fact that they had compassed the religious and moral downfall of God's own people. It was for this, and not because in a political sense they had been enemies, that Jeremiah utters this terrific pronouncement against them.

Yet the reader will not need to linger long on these chapters. They are the least characteristic portion of the work of Jeremiah, and will not reward careful study. As a custodian of the faith of the true Israel, the destruction of the heathen nations which had waged relentless war upon his people, roused his prophetic and poetic imagination. But these prophecies do not let us into his unique spiritual genius or insight, and therefore we may pass over them rapidly.

(1) Chapter 47. This chapter deals with the Philistines of whom we have heard since the days of the Judges. The day of their destruction has come at last.

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*Verse 4.* The Philistines, the sole remaining prop of Phoenicia, are cut off. *Caphtor* is probably Crete. *Verse 5.* Refers to contemporary mourning customs (see 16:6). *Verse 6.* Is probably a despairing cry of the Philistines. *Verse 7.* The answer of the prophet.

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(2) Chapter 48. A prophecy against Moab. This section is too long and prosaic and its use of other prophecies is so generous (see Isaiah 15, 16), that it is quite likely that we have here an expansion of an authentic prophecy of Jeremiah who would be sure to include Moab in his oracles on foreign nations. The chapter is remarkable for the large numbers of places which are named in it. The sites of some of these are unknown.

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*Verse 1.* *Misgob* is mentioned nowhere else. *Verse 2.* *Heshbon,* a well-known town of Moab near Mt. Nebo (Numbers 21:26, Isaiah 15:2, 16:8, 9). *Verse 3.* *Horonaim.* Its position is uncertain. *Verse 5* taken from Isaiah 15:5. *Verses 8-10* are probably not by Jeremiah. *Verse 11.* A figure of speech that may well belong to Jeremiah. Moab had degenerated because it had not had the discipline of any removal outside its own bounds and had thus settled into its native characteristics (cf. Zephaniah 1:12). *Verses 13, 14. Ashamed* = be disappointed in. *Verse 16*, cf. Isaiah 13:22, Deuteronomy 32:35. *Verse 18. Sit in thirst.* This expression occurs nowhere else. Sit in dust or filth would be more intelligible. *Verses 20-27* are probably an insertion. The section is in prose. *Verses 25 and 28* may belong to Jeremiah, but *verses 29-38* are a long quotation from Isaiah 15, 16, changed but not improved. *Verse 35* may be Jeremiah's although based on Isaiah 15:2, 16:12, but verses 39-47 are without doubt a later addition, unless we claim for Jeremiah the latter part of verse 39, and the last clause of verse 44.

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(3) Chapter 49. Prophecies against Ammon, Edom and Damascus.

(a) Ammon, verses 1-6. Like Moab and Edom, Ammon lay near the border of Israel. After the deportation of the Northern tribes, the Ammonites helped themselves to the territory which had belonged to Gad (see Amos 1:13-15).

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*Verse 1. Malcam* (better Milkam) was the god of the Ammonites. *Verse 2. Rabbah* was the chief city of Ammon. "Her daughters" are the smaller cities. The last clause of verse 2 must be omitted. Israel was to lose its own territory in the approaching exile and was not to possess that of any other people. *Verse 3.* A difficult verse. *Heshbon* belonged to Moab, and *Ai* is unknown. The text is corrupt. *Fences* = sheep-walls. The sheepfolds must be a refuge since the cities are destroyed. *Verse 4. Back-*

*sliding* is surprising, applied to a heathen nation. *Careless* or *arrogant* is the probable sense.

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(b) Edom, verses 7-22. This prophecy has especial significance because of its close parallel with portions of the book of Obadiah, the whole of which is directed against Edom. The reader will compare 49:9-10a with Obadiah 5, 6; and 49:14-16, with Obadiah 1-4. Jeremiah cannot have used Obadiah which was plainly written in its present form, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Obadiah 10ff.). And it is not clear that Obadiah used Jeremiah, "since a comparison of the texts shows that Obadiah on the whole preserves a more original form than Jeremiah" (Peake). Both prophets may thus have used an earlier prophecy which has not come down to us. For other theories, the reader is referred to by Peake, II, pp. 242-243. Probably, as in the case of the other sections, an original prophecy of Jeremiah has been considerably expanded.

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*Verse 7*. *Teman.* A district of Edom. Eliphaz the "friend" of Job was a Temanite (Job 2:11). *Verse 8*. *Dedan,* on the southern border of Edom (Ezekiel 25:13). *Verses 9, 10,* cf. Obadiah 5, 6. *Verse 11*. This noble verse is in contrast to the unmitigated hate of Edom in Obadiah. *Verse 13*. *Bozrah.* Its location has not been identified. See Isaiah 63:1. *Verses 14-16,* cf. Obadiah 1-4. Edom was a remote and inaccessible region. See George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets,* II, p. 179. It was "a well-stocked, well-watered country, full of food and lusty men; yet lifted so high, and locked so fast by precipice and slippery mountains that it calls for little trouble of defence." *Verse 17*, cf. Jeremiah 19:8, 18:16. Evidently a favorite expression. *Verse 18*. The neighboring cities are Adman and Zeboim; cf. Deuteronomy 29:23; Hosea 11:8. This verse is repeated in 50:40. *Verses 19-21* are repeated in 50:44-46, referring to Babylon. *Verse 19*. "Who will appoint me a time?" i.e. for a contest; cf. Job 9:19. No one will dare challenge God.

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(c) Damascus, verses 23-27. It is curious, if at this time Jeremiah prophesied against Damascus, that Damascus, Hamath and Arpad are not included in the list of those who drank the cup, in chapter 25:18ff. It is possible that verses 26 and 27 are a later addition.

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*Verse 23*. Hamath and Arpad are Syrian cities. They are frequently mentioned (Isaiah 10:9, 36:19, 37:13). The reference to the sea is extraordinary since all of these cities lie inland. This is possibly an indirect reference to Isaiah 57:20. *Verse 25*. The negative "not" must be removed to make sense.

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(d) Arab Tribes, verses 28-33. We are led to expect this prophecy from 25:23. It must have been written before the exile since (verse 30) Nebuchadnezzar is still the enemy of Judah. An original prophecy of Jeremiah has probably been expanded here as elsewhere. Verses 31-32 are the likely additions.

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*Verse 28*. *Kedar* (Psalm 120:5, Song of Solomon 1:5) was the name of a prosperous Arab tribe.

*Hazor* as an Arabian tribe or district is not known to us, but is frequently mentioned as a town in Palestine (Joshua 11:1, 1 Samuel 12:9, 1 Kings 9:15 etc.). *Verse 29.* Nomads are evidently in mind. *Verses 31, 32.* Composed apparently under the influence of Ezekiel 38:11 and thus belonging to a later date. *Verse 32,* cf. 9:26, 25:23. Some Arabian tribes shaved their hair as a religious rite. Hence the prohibition in Leviticus 19:27. *Verse 33,* cf. chapters 9:11, 10:22, 49:18.

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(e) Elam, verses 34-39. Elam was a country lying near Babylonia. It seems odd that Jeremiah should have included a nation so remote from Palestine. It is included here, although a special date assigns its composition to the reign of Zedekiah. The first deportation of the Jews had taken place, and this would explain the inclusion of the territory to which they had been carried in the sphere of the prophet's imagination.

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*Verse 35.* The Elamites were famous archers. *Verse 36.* This is probably a later insertion. It reflects Ezekiel 5:10, 12; 12:14; 37:9.

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This completes the brief survey of Jeremiah's prophecies "against the nations." For it is universally conceded that chapters 50, 51 (except verses 59-64) cannot be by Jeremiah. This is not because we would not expect a prophecy against Babylon. But its immense length and its constant repetitions are without any precedent in the authentic writings of Jeremiah. Moreover it constantly betrays a relationship to the later writings of Ezekiel and the second Isaiah. The situation seems to presuppose the destruction of Jerusalem, and the final exile has apparently taken place. The writer also evidently expects that the overthrow of Babylon is not far off. Jeremiah, on the contrary, always looks forward to a long captivity, and calms the people and bids them acquiesce in their lot. Since we have every reason, however, to suppose that Jeremiah may have written a prophecy against Babylon (51:59-64),[15] it is possible that it has been preserved somewhere in these lengthy chapters. But just where, it is impossible to say.

Such, then, is the record of the sweep of Jeremiah's prophetic imagination as he contemplates the moral meanings of the advance of the Babylonians upon those nations which had for so many centuries warred upon the peace and purity of the life of Israel. They are to be caught in the net of destruction. They are to suffer the penalty of their sin.

As in the case of his great forerunner Amos who performed a similar rôle in anticipation of the downfall of the Northern Kingdom (see Amos 1:3-2:8), Jeremiah does not content himself with these messages of judgment upon other nations. The same punishment is to be meted out to recreant Judah. In his great Temple sermon Jeremiah had made this plain. But with the advance of the Babylonians, his consciousness of this immense impending disaster becomes more and more acute.

11. A sample of what must have been his frequent and poignant utterance, during this period, is preserved for us in chapter 13:20-27. In this eloquent

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[15] See chapter XIV, p. 269.

passage, the prophet calls upon Jerusalem to lift up its eyes and see what is coming from the North. Its former ally has now become its oppressor. Its trouble is due to its sin. As soon expect the Ethiopian to change its skin, as Judah to do good. Because Jerusalem has forgotten its God, it shall be destroyed and its people scattered like stubble. The dynamic effect of such preaching may be easily imagined. The atmosphere of Jerusalem must have been charged with moral electricity. Lightnings played about the devoted head of this undaunted prophet, who, in spite of earlier warnings of the effect of such preaching, continued to utter the stern word of moral judgment which God had put in his mouth.

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*Verse 21.* The sense of this verse is not given by the Revised Version. Its general meaning is that Judah who has trained herself to look upon Babylon as a friend, will be pained to discover that God has set Babylon over her; cf. Ezekiel 23:22. *Verse 23.* This familiar quotation is often misused. Jeremiah does not make the statement that human nature as such is unalterable. This wholly secular and irreligious judgment would be contrary alike to the teaching of the whole Bible and of Jeremiah's view of God and man. Jeremiah is here simply saying with reference to the Jewish people that wrongdoing seems to have become a kind of second-nature to them. *Verse 26.* See Nahum 3:5. *Verse 27.* See Jeremiah 5:8.

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12. Chapter 45. We arrive now at the important year 604 B. C. The battle of Carchemish had been fought the year before, and it was clear to Jeremiah's

moral vision that nothing human could prevent the destruction of Jerusalem which God had determined upon as a punishment for the people's persistent infidelity. Only one possibility remained if this disaster were to be averted: the whole-hearted repentance of the people. It would be an eleventh-hour escape, a kind of deathbed repentance, as it were. But that door of escape was still open. There still remained a sort of despairing hope that the people would seize this last opportunity. It was this despairing hope which led Jeremiah to adopt the desperate expediency of reducing the gist of his preaching to writing, and to have this written message read, in the open, to the people, with the possibility that this total message in its full and solemn meaning would fall with such effect upon the imagination and conscience of the people, as to cause a sort of moral revolution.

With this purpose in mind,[16] Jeremiah calls to his aid one who is destined from now on to play a continuous and important rôle. Of Baruch himself, we know only what the book of Jeremiah itself tells us. He may have been a secretary by profession. He belonged to a distinguished family (see chapter III,

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[16] There are those, of whom Dr. Skinner himself is one, *op. cit.*, pp. 346-7, who regard Jeremiah's charge to Baruch as his very last word, in spite of its being dated as belonging to the reign of Jehoiakim. They feel that it reads like a farewell message, a deathbed charge. The last verse (45:5), we are told, suggests that the friends are about to separate and that Baruch is to go alone on some perilous mission, possibly to the exiles at Babylon. The passage betrays Jeremiah's grief, it is said, at this prospect of parting from his faithful friend, and thus "yield us a last glimpse into that 'lake of sorrow' which lay within the breast of the prophet." It is true that the contents of the chapter *may* suit this late date, but they also suit the earlier date when the roll is about to be written. When Baruch once puts his hand to that task, he has committed himself to the years of struggle and suffering which followed. Jeremiah is aware of this, and welcomes Baruch with these words into the fellowship of his suffering. There seems, therefore, no good reason why the date of this chapter should not stand as it is given.

p. 34), was evidently a man of training and intelligence, but unlike most of the well-born circle to which he belonged, was attracted and impressed by the personality and message of Jeremiah, and became his friend and disciple. No sooner had he avowed himself to be on the side of Jeremiah than he became an object of reproach and obloquy (45:3). Even before he had begun his sensational public service, he had had abundant opportunity to groan and to say, "Woe is me." Yet, he too felt that the Lord had laid his hand upon him. He has set down the record of this in chapter 45. In it, Baruch describes how Jeremiah summoned him to his dangerous task. Just as God had summoned Jeremiah himself from a life of ease to one of arduous service and suffering, so Jeremiah, who now has need of Baruch for an important and perilous task, calls upon Baruch to perform it. Has Baruch already had cause to be weary because of his sympathy for Jeremiah? He will have still more reason to be so. Has he cherished the idea that he will do great things for himself? He had better give up that idea. For the Lord plans to bring evil upon all flesh including the flesh of Judah, and if Baruch accepts his commission, his life will be in danger with every step that he takes from now onward.[17]

Such is the alluring invitation which Jeremiah holds out to Baruch. Yet it is precisely the kind of invitation to which a man of noble spirit responds. It is said that Garibaldi before he moved on to the capture of Rome addressed his troops and said: "Men, I have nothing to offer you but sacrifice, pain and death, but I bid you to follow me"; and they sprang after him in troops. When General Armstrong began his work for the negroes in Virginia, he wrote a letter to a friend of his in the North saying: "If you want to sail into a good hearty battle where there is no pen-scratching and pin-sticking, but great guns and heavy shot only are used, come here." And of course, she went. It was in this spirit that Baruch accepted his commission and enlisted definitely in the service of God under Jeremiah.

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[17] For another interpretation of this chapter, the reader is referred to Peake II, p. 210. The present writer sees no need of these remoter suggestions.

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*45:1. These words.* The reading should probably be "the words." The memoirs of Baruch were not dictated by Jeremiah. *Verse 4. Thus shalt thou say unto him.* Omit these words. They "do not harmonize with the preceding, in which Baruch himself and not Jeremiah is addressed" (Peake).

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13. Chapter 36. The first task, then, assigned to Baruch, and the immediate cause of Jeremiah's laying hands on him, as it were, is to write out the prophecies of Jeremiah, for the purpose of having them read to the people. All of this is described to us in the thirty-sixth chapter of Jeremiah, to which the reader will next turn. This account was written by Baruch himself. The motive which prompted Jeremiah to write out his prophecies was an inspiration from God Himself (verses 1, 2). Its purpose was the possible turning of the people to repentance and forgiveness (verses 3, 4, 7). So, Baruch wrote the prophecies out as they were dictated by Jeremiah. The moment chosen to have them read was a dramatic one. The Chaldeans had begun their advance, and a national fast has been proclaimed (Jeremiah 36:9). Jerusalem was filled

with a sober, solemn multitude. Standing before them Baruch read the prophecies "in the ears of all the people" (verses 8, 9), who heard them in silence. Shaphan, member of a family which had always been friendly to Jeremiah, hastened to inform the prince. Baruch was sent for, and, at their request, read the prophecies over again in their ears. Amazed at what they heard, they asked Baruch how he came to write such words, and they were told that Jeremiah had dictated them to him.

At this point we have a clear indication of the authority which Jeremiah had won for himself as a prophet. Not only the people, but even the princes and the priests seemed awed into silence. They showed no sign of anger against Jeremiah. On the contrary, they seemed at first to look upon all this as an authentic word of God. They knew what the effect would be upon the degenerate king who seemed beyond the reach of any Divine appeal. So they urged Baruch and Jeremiah to go into hiding for awhile (verses 19, 20). Then the princes went to King Jehoiakim and reported what they had heard. The king sent for the roll of prophecies, had them read to him by his scribe Jehudi, who, as he read, at the king's command cut the roll off and threw it into the fire until the whole was burned. The king then ordered the arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch, but they could not be found (verses 20-26). Then, at the Lord's command, Jeremiah dictated his prophecies again to Baruch, "and added besides unto them many like words," predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, the ignominious death of Jehoiakim, and the punishment of the people (verses 26-32).

This story is told us in a straightforward, unimpassioned way by Baruch, but its intensely dramatic qualities lie upon the surface. The story reveals the selfless intrepid nature of both Jeremiah and Baruch. The latter does not hesitate to carry out his perilous mission, although he must have known that he took his life in his hands when he did so. That neither Jeremiah nor Baruch had any morbid desire for a martyr's fate is shown by their readiness to hide themselves at the suggestion of the princes who well knew what effect the reading of the roll would have upon the king. Jeremiah's last attempt to forestall the destruction of the people had failed, as, in his heart, he had felt that it would fail.[18]

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*36:2. Against Israel.* The words cannot be correct. Insert "Jerusalem" instead. These prophecies of Jeremiah were not directed against the Northern Kingdom. *Verse 3,* cf. *26:3. Verse 4. From the mouth.* Jeremiah may have read some of these prophecies from his own composition. It does not follow that they were all dictated from memory. *Verse 5. I am shut up:* An unfortunate translation. The phrase does not mean that Jeremiah was imprisoned, but only that he was forbidden because of his previous utterances in the Temple area (cf. 20:1-6) from speaking there again. Translate: "I am forbidden to go there." *Verse 6.* Jeremiah chose a fast day because of the large number who would be there, and because of the solemn and receptive mood of the people. *Verse 7.* Cf. 2 Kings 22:13. *Verse 9.* The fifth year. The delay of a year is difficult to understand. Possibly they waited for the proper fast day to arrive. *Verse 10.* The accurate details presuppose an eyewitness, viz. Baruch. Gemariah was a son of the Shaphan who had read the Book of the Laws to Josiah (2 Kings 22:10) and a brother of Ahikam (Jeremiah 26:24), Jeremiah's protector. He was, we may assume, friendly to Jeremiah. *Verse 12. He went down.* The Temple being higher than the palace. Contrast 26:10. *Verse 15.* Note the courteous treatment shown to Baruch. *Verse 16. unto Baruch.* Omit these words. The sentence "describes the result of their deliberations among themselves" (Peake). *Verse 17. At his mouth.* These words should also be omitted. They anticipate Baruch's answer. *Verse 20. They had laid up the roll,* probably hoping that the king would be satisfied with their oral report and would not ask for the full text. *Verse 23.* Driver's translation gives the real meaning: "as often as Jehudi read three or four pages (columns), he cut them." *Verse 24.* Possibly an intended contrast with 2 Kings 22:11, describing the effect of the reading of the Book of the Laws upon Josiah. *Verse 25.* This mention of Elnathan does not seem to fit in with the part he played in 26:22. The apparent contradiction may be explained either by saying that in this instance he was prompted by superstition, or in that by coercion.

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[18] What this account has to tell us about the composition of the book of Jeremiah as a whole has been discussed in chapter III.

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The march of the Chaldeans upon Jerusalem had begun. Their advance, however, was not rapid. Carchemish was far away on the Euphrates, and there was much territory to be reduced and many places to be captured before Jerusalem could be reached. A year or more was probably required for this purpose. And it was a year of terror for the people at Jerusalem. Hordes of refugees driven southward began to appear telling of the steady approach of the enemy. Moreover Nebuchadnezzar incited some of the surrounding peoples to make raids into the Jewish territory. It must have been a time of terrible confusion and alarm. Certain passages in the book of Jeremiah give us an insight into these conditions, and reveal his own attitude at this moment of national peril.

14. Chapter 12:7-17. This prophecy, which stands in no relation with its context, describes the ravaging of Judah by its neighbors, and predicts its exile and restoration. In 2 Kings 24:1, 2, we have a description of an attack on Judah from various sources. It may be to these invasions that this prophecy refers. The passage has all the traits of Jeremiah's spirit: his uncompromising moral conscience which sees in the sufferings of the people the just punishment of their sins, yet with it a soul filled with pain and pity at the desolation of the land, upon which the Lord will yet have compassion, if only the people will turn unto Him.

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*12:7. Mine house* may be either the Temple or the land (Hosea 8:1, 9:15). The latter is the more probable. *Verse 9.* God asks the question, instead of making a statement, to show his "pained astonishment" at the situation. *Verse 10* refers to the way in which pastoral nomads often trod down the vineyards. *Verse 11. Unto me* i.e. to my sorrow. The people are carelessly indifferent to the results of their reckless conduct. *Verse 13.* The people reap no reward for their labor in planting their fields. "They" are the Jews and not the "spoilers." *Verses 15-16.* These verses are among many in Jeremiah containing beautiful promises of restoration. Jeremiah never lost faith in the ultimate salvation of Israel. Even after the exile, he pinned his hopes on a sanctified remnant. This element of spiritual hope which outlived condemnation and disaster is among the noblest attributes of the soul of Jeremiah.

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15. Chapter 35. Among the refugees who swarmed down upon Jerusalem were the nomad tribes of the Rechabites. Originally all of the Israelites were nomads. But after their settlement in Canaan they became for the most part agriculturalists. Thus their religion became infected with the heathenish practices of the Canaanites whose gods, Baalim, were supposed to foster the fertility of the land. Each district had its Baal and upon the favor of the Baalim depended the success of the crops. Since much licentiousness was connected with the worship of these Baalim, the religion of Jehovah became contaminated by these foul rites. It was as a protest against this defilement of their faith that the Rechabites condemned the settled agricultural life and took the vow to maintain the primitive nomad life of Israel and to preserve the primitive faith in its original purity. Two centuries before the time of Jeremiah, Jonadab the founder of these purists had laid his commands upon his family, and his descendants had been true to their vows ever since.[19] Only the invasion of the Babylonians had driven them from the open country and compelled them to seek safety within the walls of Jerusalem. Jeremiah uses the well-known record of their

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[19] The Rechabites are referred to also in 2 Kings 10:15ff, and in Nehemiah 3:14. For a full account, see Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible,* in loco.

fidelity to point the moral to the faithless people of Jerusalem. Obeying a command from the Lord, the prophet brought certain Rechabites into a chamber of the Temple and offered them wine. This they refused to drink because it was contrary to their vows. Will not the people learn the lesson? The Rechabites will be spared, but because the Jews have not been true to their vows, the threatened evil will surely come upon them.

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*35:2. The house,* i.e. the family. *Verse 3. Chamber,* a large open accessible room, so that the people could be spectators of what happened. *Verse 4. Hanan.* Not mentioned elsewhere. *Maaseiah,* probably the father of the priest Zephaniah. *Verse 6. Jonadab* (2 Kings 10:15, 23). *Verse 11.* See 2 Kings 24:2. *Verse 12.* This does not introduce a subsequent occasion, but indicates the rush of the Divine inspiration which caused Jeremiah to drive the lesson home then and there. The address which follows may have suffered considerable editorial expansion. *Verse 19. To stand before* means to minister to, to serve. It is used of Jeremiah himself (15:19).

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16. Chapter 22:20-23.[20] This short prophecy seems to be a detached fragment. It occurs in the chapter of prophecies against the kings of Judah, and

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[20] Chapters 22 and 23 contain prophecies about Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. They cannot have been written at the same time since each refers to its own historical period. When the book of Jeremiah was edited, however, they were all brought together in these chapters, since they refer to the same general subject. The prophecies relating to Jehoahaz (22:10-12) and to Jehoiakim (22:1-19) have been discussed in chapter IX. 22:24-30 and passages in chapter 23 are treated in chapter XIV.

is found between one addressed against Jehoiakim (see p. 122) and another against Jehoiachin (see p. 243). No individual king is named, and as the feminine pronoun shows, it was addressed to the community as a whole. Because it predicts the fate that will overtake the nation's rulers, it seems to have been inserted here. It probably belongs at the end of Jehoiakim's reign. The people are asked to go up on the heights of the three mountainous regions on the north and east and see how the defences are all broken down. Their former allies ("shepherds," and "lovers," verse 22) are helpless before the Babylonians to whom Judah is thus exposed. The evil ways of the nation have caused its ruin.

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*Verse 20. Bashan.* See Numbers 21:33. Abarmi (Numbers 27:12, Deuteronomy 32:49) from which Moses viewed the Promised Land. Mt. Nebo formed part of the range. The high mountains were appropriate places for the proclamation of good or of evil tidings; cf. Isaiah 40:9, Judges 9:7. *Verse 22.* Render "the wind shall shepherd all my shepherds," i.e. the rulers of Judah shall be driven into exile.

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In the year 600 B. C., the Chaldeans were at last before Jerusalem. The Judeans submitted without resistance, the City capitulated, Jehoiakim became the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, and the nation paid tribute to the Babylonian empire. Thus matters remained for three years. Then the spirit of revolt began to spread. Egypt, sullen at her defeat, sought to persuade Judah to join her in an attempt to throw off the yoke of Babylon. The pseudo-patriotic party at

Jerusalem urged Jehoiakim to listen to Egypt. At this point, Jeremiah appears upon the scene and used all of his influence and efforts to bring the infatuated people to their senses. Nothing but disaster and destruction could result from such a fatal step. The passages in which this attitude is described are found in a few verses of chapter 17.

17. Chapter 17:5-8. To the party who were relying upon Egypt, to save the nation from Babylon, Jeremiah pronounces a solemn curse, precisely as Isaiah had denounced the alliance with Egypt against Assyria. Their only hope is in the Lord. He can cause them to flourish like a great flourishing tree; but to trust in Egypt is to be like a juniper tree, which is starved and stunted, whose roots have no water, its leaves no rain.

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*Verse 6. Heath.* The word is found also in Psalm 102:17 where it is translated "destitute." The context shows that a tree or shrub is meant. The juniper tree is a probable conjecture. *17:8.* The passage is parallel with Psalm 1. It is probable that the psalmist imitates the prophet.

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In spite, however, of all that Jeremiah could do, Jehoiakim openly revolted against Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. The other states of Palestine, instead of joining with him, overran the territory of Judah at the instigation of their Babylonian master. Nebuchadnezzar himself, who had returned to Babylon, did not at first consider this revolt serious enough to demand his return in person to Palestine, but sent some of his own troops to assist the bands of the surrounding nations. In one of the skirmishes around the city of Jerusalem, which was defending itself against its foes, Jehoiakim was killed. While his death is veiled in much obscurity, it is likely that the prediction of Jeremiah (22:18, 19, 36:30) was fulfilled and that his dead body lay unburied outside the walls of Jerusalem. This conclusion is confirmed by 2 Kings 24:6, which says nothing about his burial.

Thus this inveterate foe of Jeremiah came to an ignominious end. The faith of the prophet had been vindicated. The nation had, by its folly and irreligion, been brought to the very verge of doom. But Jeremiah himself is found standing upright in the sheer strength of his conviction that all of these terrible events are ordered by the Word and Will of God. When we resume our study of the political situation, we shall see the current, already flowing swiftly, carry the Jewish nation over the brink, and we shall see Jeremiah, undaunted and unafraid, sharing the fate of the people whom he had vainly tried to save.

# CHAPTER XII

## THE SOUL OF JEREMIAH

Chapters 1; 4:10, 19; 6:11; 11:18-23; 12:1-3, 5, 6; 15:10-21; 17:9, 10, 14-17; 18:18-23; 20:7-18

The years of Jehoiakim's misrule of Judah from 608 B.C. had been for Jeremiah crowded with outward events and with inward tumult. He had stretched his prophetic soul to the limits of physical and spiritual endurance. With all of his moral might he had opposed the foreign policies of the king and the irreligious and unscrupulous government of his own people. And at the end of this decade of his career, he beheld the nation at the mercy of the Babylonians, whose coming in judgment he had so confidently foreseen and foretold.

Inevitably, at such a crisis, the soul of the prophet withdrew within itself. The tides of the Spirit which had mounted to such heights of prophetic power and insight receded, and left him, for the moment, alone and impotent. The inevitable reaction had overtaken him. Such episodes are a familiar part of all spiritual biography. The higher the soul is able to mount, the lower also it is able to sink. Inspiration is followed by depression. Moments of exalted heroism are succeeded by moods of futility and discouragement. Thus Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal, and then is seen lying under a juniper tree praying that the Lord will let him die. Catherine of Siena confronts popes with reproaches, and then appears as a weak and querulous woman. Luther stands boldly before the Council at Worms, and then acts like an uninspired and superstitious man. It was just so with Jeremiah. He had risen to great heights. He had proved himself superior to kings, priests, princes. By the very audacity of his faith, he had cowed a hostile populace. His convictions had been vindicated by the event. And then, at this supreme moment, doubt overtook him. He ceased to be the inspired prophet. He became a weak, questioning man. He went down into the "black night" of the mystics. He questioned everything except that what he had done had been done under the Will and direction of God. But why it had to be done, above all why he had to do it, this became the tragic problem of his soul. With this problem he must now wrestle. Once more, before the end of his career, he is to appear as the strong and fearless prophet, standing unafraid in the midst of a crashing world. But between the period out of which he now emerges and before that into which he is about to plunge, we have this dark hour of inward conflict. For a time, therefore, we leave the arena of political events and enter into the inmost recesses of the soul of the prophet who struggles to understand the ways of God and the moral meanings of His Will.

Of course the question arises whether these "Confessions" of Jeremiah, as they are called, belong predominantly to a single period of his career, or whether they lie scattered all along the pathway of his spiritual progress. And the further question remains, if they do belong in the main to a single moment in his experience, where we are to look for it. For these "Confessions" are undated, and the decision lies in the sphere of psychology and not of outer history. The present writer holds, with many others, that in these

"Confessions" we have the record of a definite episode in the spiritual experience of Jeremiah. This period, in his judgment, however, does not lie before the beginning of Jeremiah's political activity,[1] but at the close of his struggle with Jehoiakim. Only then did the whole moral problem unfold itself before him. Only then did he see how deeply he himself was involved in its tragic meanings. The ruin of the people whom he loved was now imminent. And it was he who had foretold it and had even seemed to hasten its coming. The situation was one to cause his heart to break. And it is a breaking heart which we find revealed in the "protest and agony" of these "Confessions."

We must assume that these are excerpts from a spiritual diary in which Jeremiah set down his intimate reflections. That he designed them for any public purpose or expected that they would be read by others is hardly to be believed. Yet to-day they are almost the most precious portion of the entire book which bears Jeremiah's name. Not only do they reveal to us the inmost heart of this remarkable man, but they permit us, so to speak, to look behind the scenes into the very nature of the prophetic consciousness. Thus they take their place in the front rank of spiritual autobiography, of the confessional literature of the world.

In an earlier chapter,[2] the nature of Old Testament prophecy was briefly discussed. We saw that here is a unique phenomenon in the history of religion. Here is an experience of God for which we look elsewhere in vain. Both in the character of the prophets themselves, and in the content of their message and its influence on the religious destinies of mankind, Old Testament prophecy is in a class by itself.

[1] This view is defended by Skinner, op. cit., pp. 208-10.

[2] Chapter IV, "The Genius of Prophecy."

The questions naturally arise: Is it possible to analyze or to explain this prophetic consciousness? What are its peculiarities? What differentiates it from other forms of religious inspiration? What are its outstanding characteristics? How is it to be explained? What was its source? How was it received and transmitted through the personality of the prophet? What was its effect on the personality of the prophet? How did the prophet know that it was not he who spoke, but God who spoke through him? How was he sure that the word of God was not altered or changed or spoiled as it passed into his own soul, and, through his utterance, into the minds of the people to whom he spoke? Is it possible, in a word, to get at the secret of this inspiration whereby these men became the mouthpieces, as it were, of the Will of God?[3]

Of course here are questions the answer to which can never be final or complete. Just as all personality must remain in a sense a mystery, so these inspired personalities can never be explained. In the last analysis, we stand before a fact which must be accepted, which can never be understood. Any experience of God is one of these realities which defies analysis.[4] One recognizes its worth and reality because of what it is. One cannot discover or explain the secret, the mystery of the soul itself. If this is true of all personality, it is supremely true of the personalities of these inspired men. They were God-possessed, God-controlled, God-directed men, living and working under the profound conviction, which nothing could shake, that they were the chosen instruments of the

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[3] The reader will consult A. B. Davidson's *Old Testament Prophecy*, chapter on "Psychology and Prophecy."

[4] For a discussion of this subject, the reader is referred to the author's *Eloquence of Christian Experience*, pp. 35-38, 47, 48.

Word and Will of God. But how they became this, to the degree and with the effect that they became it, that must forever remain one of those mysteries which the most astute examination and analysis can never fully explain.

The men themselves could not explain it. A God-possessed soul knows that it is possessed of God, but how God comes to possess it, how the soul comes into the realization that it is so possessed, for it is a reality which may be felt but may not be analyzed. It is precisely with the nature of this reality that these "Confessions" of Jeremiah have to do. Here he seems deliberately to have bared his soul. He lets us watch the working of the prophetic mind, the struggles of the prophetic soul. He has revealed his most intimate piety, and has left us a priceless and precious record of his experience of God.

The passages containing this material are scattered in an order arranged not by Jeremiah but by the editor throughout the book. Chiefly, however, they are to be found in chapters 15-20. Without doubt from the very beginning Jeremiah brooded over the "why" and "wherefore" of his mission. From the first he seems to have drawn back in something akin to spiritual horror from the commission to be the mouthpiece of the judgment of God upon his people. And increasingly as he goes forward he protests that he cannot go on. He argues, expostulates, and even accuses God in his effort to escape from the driving power of the inspiration which urges him forward. In a word, from the beginning the Divine power was pain to him, not joy but agony. Isaiah[5] accepts his mission and springs to it with joy. But Jeremiah is coerced. And this sense of being compelled to his task results in a high debate with God running all through the record, but reaching its climax in the spiritual conflict reflected in his later and final "Confessions." In this conflict lies the key to the inner life of Jeremiah.

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[5] See George Adam Smith, op. cit., pp. 317-319.

Without doubt the description of his call to be a prophet found in chapter 1, was taken from the spiritual diary of Jeremiah.[6] Here is no mere trance or vision or ecstasy. Rather the whole man is laid hold of by the Spirit of God, to be used by Him for the accomplishment of His Will. Here also is the shrinking of the soul of Jeremiah from its calling, his protest that he is incapable, unworthy and unwilling to assume such a task. But here also is the Divine Word which touched his mouth, a Word which remained as a burning fire in his heart (6:11, 20:9). Upon this foundation all the later spiritual experience of Jeremiah was based. It was all against his will. But the Lord was too strong for him. And Jeremiah "hurtles on his career like one slung at a target who knows that in fulfilling his commission he shall be broken—as indeed he was."[7] It is against such a background of spiritual experience that we are enabled to understand the "Confessions" of Jeremiah.

Of course, all this did not break upon the soul of Jeremiah at once. On the contrary, it must have been a gradual, a developing experience. When at a later period of his life he wrote out the record of his "Call," he doubtless read into it its tragic consequences as he had come to understand them. At first we may imagine there was a sense of exaltation and even of joy in the thought that he had been chosen by God as His messenger and mouthpiece. True, he had protested that he was but a "child" (Jeremiah 1:7). But all chosen of God, from Moses to Mary at the Annunciation, have shrunk from the contemplation of their high calling. And Jeremiah must have felt a certain pride that he was to be set "over the kingdoms to pluck up and to break down" (Jeremiah 1:10). There was nothing yet to show that his path was not to be one of power and even success in the eyes of men. His first experience, in connection with the Scythian invasions, did not reveal what was to be his destiny, although it may have lessened his confidence in the accuracy of his predictions. At any rate, the tide of the Scythian invasion rolled by, and Jeremiah's standing and reputation had not appreciably suffered by the episode. This is not to say that he had not himself suffered in this initial experience of declaring outward disaster to be a punishment for national sin. There are preserved for us at this early date one or two short passages which are a pathetic indication of what was to be the deepening experience of Jeremiah's life. In chapter 4:10, 19, we find the earliest of Jeremiah's protests against the Divine Will and method. "Then said I, Ah: Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem saying: Ye shall have peace, whereas the sword reaches into the soul." [8] It is a characteristic of Jerusalem's intimate relation with God that he does not hesitate to reproach God for what seem to be His mysterious and incalculable ways. In 4:19, we have an acute cry of pain which seems almost physical in its intensity. The soul of Jeremiah has heard the sound of the trumpet, and its reverberations upon his emotional nature causes him acute anguish because it means the punishment, if not the destruction, of his people. And in 6:11, he describes the effect upon him of being "full of the fury of the Lord," which he cannot restrain but must pour out even upon the innocent children, upon the assemblies of young men, upon the women in their homes, and the aged in their weakness. These are strokes, sketches of the kind of experience which is to become the spiritual burden of his soul.

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[6] See chapter V of this book.

[7] George Adam Smith, ibid., p. 318.

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[8] A. S. Peake (Vol. 1, p. 120) changes the reading to "They (i.e. the false prophets) shall say," thus removing this passage from the words of Jeremiah.

However, the skies cleared. The death of Manasseh after his long, wicked reign, the succession of Josiah, and the inauguration of the Great Reform, must have filled Jeremiah's heart with a great hope for the future of the people. At last a chosen of the Lord had come to the throne, and the corruptions in worship, in society, and in politics were to come to an end. As we have seen, Jeremiah threw himself with ardor into the work of national reform and espoused with energy and hopefulness the program of the reformers.

It was the aftermath of the Reform movement which must have disillusioned Jeremiah both with respect to the national outlook and with respect to his own future. Three sinister events blackened the horizon which never again cleared during the whole of Jeremiah's career. His own people turned against him in rage because, by espousing the program of Josiah for the centralizing of the worship at Jerusalem, he had caused the abolishment of the local sanctuaries at Anatoth, and brought about the degradation of the local priests. The developments of the Great Reform convinced him at last, that the soul of the people would never be saved by merely outward and legal methods, the upshot of which seemed to be a great national hypocrisy, a substitution of the outward observance of religion for its ethical practice in the personal and community life. Finally, the unexpected death of Josiah and the advent to the throne of Jehoiakim changed in the twinkling of an eye the whole situation and precipitated the moral struggle which was never to end until this martyr-prophet breathed his last.

The first of these events, the persecution of Jeremiah at the hands of his fellow-townsmen at Anatoth was the cause of the earliest of the "Confessions" of Jeremiah, if we exclude his description of his call to be a prophet, and the detached passages to which reference has been made. It is found in chapters 11:18-23, 12:1-3, 5, 6.[9] The unjust, unexpected and heartless treatment which he suffered, roused the soul of Jeremiah to protest and resentment. Neither God on the one hand, whose cause he had espoused, nor the people on the other hand, whose welfare he was serving, had the right to treat him thus. His deeply emotional nature is hurt to its center by what appears to him to be both a Divine and a human injustice, and he pours out his protest in words the intensity of which must cause the devout modern reader to wonder. Just here, however, we touch the deep religiousness of Jeremiah's nature as revealed in these "Confessions." For it must be recalled that Jeremiah is not complaining because of some personal injustice which befalls him, as it does all men, in the course of human experience. Had he remained quietly at Anatoth, and there experienced the normal sorrows and disappointments of life, such passages as these would not have been written at all. These protests are written rather out of the heart of a worker for righteousness. It is here that Jeremiah differentiates himself from other less religious men. These complain to God because of some private misfortune or misunderstanding which has overtaken them. At this point, Jeremiah would not have complained at all. But Jeremiah protests that while he has been struggling for God and for His cause, God seems to have deserted His servant and allowed him to become the victim of His enemies. Many people to-day know so little of any such struggle and care so little for the working of His will, and walk with God at such a safe and comfortable distance, that they are not capable of such feelings of dissatisfaction with the Divine method. It is only the martyr for righteousness' sake who can enter into, understand, and sympathize with this deep spiritual discontent and agony. Let anyone devote himself to any unpopular cause, lose himself in struggling for it, only to find that he is apparently deserted by man and God alike, stand alone and defenseless the target for abuse and unjust persecution, and he will understand such a complaint to God, even if he does not voice it himself. That Jeremiah does voice it, moreover, does not mean that he is the less godly on that account. Rather the contrary. It indicates the degree of intimacy which existed between him and God, the depth of fellowship, the reality of a long acquaintance and a familiar communion between himself and the Heart of God. When one suppresses the natural emotions, censors one's prayers, introduces the ideas of propriety and etiquette in what one says to God, one betrays thereby the distance at which one feels oneself to be from God. But Jeremiah does none of these things. He pours out hot and passionate his protest just as he feels it, and thereby he betrays his nearness to God. One can imagine the same situation between friends to-day. Their very intimacy, their affection, their mutual trust permits reproaches and indignant protests that would not be tolerated between those who were less close to each other. Thus in what seems like irreverent language is seen the deep religiousness of the soul of Jeremiah.

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[9] These passages have been discussed in their historical connection in chapter VII.

As for his vindictive imprecations upon the people of Anatoth, these doubtless indicate a defect in the moral nature of the prophet. Temperamentally, like many another poetic nature, he was irascible.[10] His experience did not tend to lessen this characteristic. His sensitive nature was plowed and harried by the circumstances of his life. Every event of his life jarred on his strung nerves. He was tortured beyond endurance by the implacable foes who pursued him. In *Ariel,* the biography of Shelley, an account is given in an early chapter of the young poet's experience at Eton. Discovering Shelley's sensitive nature, his unfeeling schoolmates would torture him by their taunts and insults, until Shelley would back up against some wall, his face would go white, his voice, usually soft, would rise to a shrill scream of rage, and his whole nature would explode in a spasm of anger. We behold much the same scene more than once in the history of Jeremiah's life. Without doubt, also, he had never learned the highest lesson of moral experience, the love of one's enemies. His was essentially a loving heart. He loved nature, he loved God, he loved Jerusalem and the people to whom he belonged. But he still cherished the Hebrew idea that to hate one's enemies was as natural as to love one's friends. This, however, is only to say that we are still in the Old Testament. And Jeremiah was so convinced that his enemies were God's enemies that his very love of righteousness directed the full force of his vindictive hatred against those who were plotting not only his own destruction, but also the overthrow of the kingdom of God.

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[10] See chapter VII, pp. 96, 97.

The passage in 11:18, 19, is thus translated by Skinner:

Verse 18. But Yahwe made me know, and I knew:
Their ill deeds I saw;

Verse 19. While I like a tame pet-lamb
That is led to the shambles
Knew not that for my undoing
They hatched a plot:
"Let us kill the tree in its sap,—
Cut him off from the land of the living,
That his name be remembered no more."

Reflection on this experience causes Jeremiah to raise the question of the justice of God's dealings with him, the great problem of how to reconcile the goodness of God with the inequalities of experience, which vexed the Psalmists and the later speculative writers of the Old Testament.[11]

Chapter 12. Verse 1. Why is the way of the wicked so smooth,
And all treacherous men at ease?

Verse 3. But thou, O Yahwe, hast known me,
Hast tried how my heart is with Thee.

The answer is given in verse 5 (verse 4 is an evident interpolation)

Verse 5. With footmen thou hast run and art weary,
Then how wilt thou vie with horses?
In a land of peace thou art not at ease,
Then how wilt thou fare in Jordan's brakes?

Such is the "comfort" which God gives his servant. He is reminded that he stands only upon the threshold of his career; that the severest tests are before him; that if he complains now, what will he do later? But "comfort" in the strict etymological meaning of the term it was. It fortified the soul of Jeremiah, and caused the full loyalty of his nature to rise in response to this stern summons to heroism. He proved later that he could vie with horsemen, and his soul remained undaunted in the jungles of Jordan, in the shambles of Jerusalem's disaster and destruction.

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[11] Skinner, ibid., pp. 110-111.

In chapter 15:10-21, we have another of these outpourings of the soul of Jeremiah. We are carried now into the very midst of the prophet's struggles and sufferings. Impossible as it is to date the section with precision, it may well belong to the closing years of Jehoiakim's dreadful and tragic reign, when Jeremiah is all but engulfed in the torrent of events which results in the first capture of Jerusalem and the death of the king. It is out of the events which have been described in the previous chapter of this book, therefore, that Jeremiah now speaks. It is indeed a "striking and precious section," and it "bears its genuineness on the face of it." [12] In it, Jeremiah laments that he was ever chosen to the dreadful and uncongenial task of prophesying the destruction of his own people. Neither can he understand why the people should hate him as they do. Cannot they understand that he is not speaking for himself, not speaking what he wishes to speak, but speaking only what he is compelled to speak by the authoritative voice of God Himself? Cannot they recognize that authority, understand that this message comes from God, and not hate the man who is the unwilling but only the obedient mouthpiece of the Divine Will? If he had been a sinner, a usurer, a defaulting debtor, there might be reason for hating him. But he has been none of these things. His hands and his conscience are clean (verse 10). So far from doing them evil, he has done them good. Although they were his foes, he has pleaded to God for them, in the time of evil and in the day of distress (verse 11). Too much has been expected of him. He is not made of iron and brass, but of flesh and blood (verse 12). He begs the Lord to remember what he has suffered, not to forsake him, and to avenge him of his persecutors (verse 15). He has taken the message of God and he has made it a very part of himself, and it has been a holy joy to him fearlessly to utter God's Word and Will without thought of himself, for he has been named with the Name of God (verse 16). His lot has not been with the merrymakers. He has been alone with God. Not natural joy but divine indignation has been the perpetual mood of his soul (verse 17). Why has he been condemned to such an experience? Why has he been all his lifelong like a traveler who hoping to find water in the desert has found only a dried-up spring (verse 18)?

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[12] A. S. Peake, ibid., Vol. 1, p. 209.

And to this impassioned outburst, just as in chapter 12:6, the Lord in His answer has apparently little sympathy to offer—at least as that term is usually understood. Instead of praise for the past, and tender comfort for the present, we have an implied rebuke. He may return to God and resume His service. . . . Unshrinking obedience, rendered without hesitation or complaint, that is the condition imposed by God on those who aspire to the high dignity of His service (verse 19). The only reward offered is the assurance that ultimately his enemies shall not prevail against him, and that he himself shall save his soul alive. It may seem in all this as if God were indeed a hard taskmaster, as if He might have shown more pity for His faithful and long-suffering servant. It must be remembered, however, that it is those who seem the sternest and most exacting who are able to call forth from others the largest measure of devotion. It was the stern demands of God that steeled the soul of Jeremiah. He was neither flattered nor weakened nor allowed to waver from his mission. We have defective ideas of what true sympathy means. If a little more iron were stirred in the enfeebling compassion which we often bestow upon others, they would be braced and heartened, and become enduring and unyielding. To know that circumstance shall never triumph over us, ought to be enough. The only reward which a true man asks for service well done, is more and higher service. That reward was Jeremiah's as the sequel will show.

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This section is not without its textual difficulties. The meaning of *15:11* is not at all clear. It is so difficult to explain and to fit into the passage that some scholars consider that it is a gloss and that it belongs in the margin and not in the text. The reading may be amended, however, to add a strong point in the plea of Jeremiah. This is brought out in the translation of George Adam Smith:

> Amen, O Lord (to their curses)! If I be to blame
> If I never besought Thee,
> In the time of their trouble and straits,
> For the good of my foes.

*Verse 12* is also an enigma as it appears even in the Revised Version. The text is evidently corrupt. As

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[18] *Jeremiah,* published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York, p. 324.

it stands, the meaning seems to be a promise of God that the Babylonians from the North will triumph, and thus Jeremiah be vindicated and delivered from the hands of his countrymen. But why should this interruption to the protest of Jeremiah be inserted so abruptly here? A slight emendation of the text furnishes a clue to its possible meaning.

Is the arm on my shoulder iron
  or brass my brow?

What, Jeremiah thus asks, does the Lord take him for? How much does He think a human body and soul can stand? Verses 13 and 14 are probably a later insertion. They are out of place here, and interrupt the dialogue between the Lord and Jeremiah which is resumed in verse 15. The rest of the passage, through the chapter, is plain reading.

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In chapter 17, verses 9, 10, 14-17, we find a bit of religious introspection which suggests one of the deepest problems of Jeremiah's religious experience. It is thus translated by Skinner (p. 205):

Verse 9. Deep beyond sounding is the heart,
  And sick beyond cure:
Who can know it?
Verse 10. I, Yahwe, search the heart,
  And try the reins;
To give to a man as his ways,
  The fruit of his doings.
Verse 14. Heal me, Yahwe, that I may be healed;
  Save me that I may be saved;
For thou art my praise!
Verse 15. Lo, They are saying to me,
  "Where, then, is Yahwe's word?
Let it but come!"

Verse 16. But I have not pressed for the evil day,
    Nor desired the day of woe:
  Thou knowest.
    What has come forth from my lips
    Lies plain before thee.

Verse 17. Be not a terror to me,
    Thou, my trust in the evil day!

The reader will note that while verses 9, 10, have no immediate connection with what precedes, they do connect beautifully with verses 14-18. Verse 11 seems to be an isolated proverb which somehow or other found its way into the passage, and verses 12 and 13 are probably an editorial insertion. Joining verses 9 and 10 with 14-18, however, we have another colloquy between Jeremiah and the Lord, which plumbs to the depths of the prophet's soul. He is not speaking here in abstract terms about the deceitfulness of the heart in general, or of how there is no health in the human heart as such. He is thinking of himself. Some flash of insight, some sudden "rending of the veil" which obscures our inmost selves from our sight and knowledge, reveals the frailty, the weakness, the infirmity of his own nature to the prophet. And with this insight, disturbing as it is, comes the further terrifying thought: If he can thus become aware of his own moral infirmity, why may there not be further shortcomings which he for his blindness can neither see nor know? And how can he be sure that this disease of his nature does not vitiate his work and disqualify him for his mission as spokesman for the Most High? This is indeed the midnight of the soul, the darkness which is the classic agony of the mystic of every day and generation. Nothing so tortures the soul of one who longs for nothing so much as to walk in the light, to dwell in the light of the knowledge of God and the assurance of communion with Him, as the suspicion that there is that in him which separates him from the Holiness of God and bars him from fellowship with Him who is Light and with whom is no darkness at all. It is in such a mood, which only those can know who literally hunger and thirst for righteousness, that Jeremiah here finds himself. Here is no mere morbid lamentation over personal delinquency, here is the tragic question whether his soul, as he sees and knows it, is capable of receiving and uttering naltered, in the fullness of its beauty, or the awfulness of its warning, the message of God to man. Jeremiah is not thinking of his personal salvation. He is thinking of his moral qualification to be a true spokesman of God.

The same haunting doubt must overtake every one who ever seriously proposes to speak to another of the things of God. How can he be sure that his own nature is so transparent, his own insight so clear, his own heart in such fellowship with God, that when others put to him the tragic problems of their lives, he will be able to utter the Truth of God to them? Has he never seen in his own life what disqualifies himself in his own eyes from filling such a rôle? And if he has, what of the dark hinterland of that very temper and disposition of his nature which may have become discolored or clouded in ways of which he knows nothing? (cf. Psalms 19:12-14, 51:9-15).

It is out of such a haunting skepticism of his own moral nature and equipment to be the mouthpiece of God that Jeremiah utters that deepest of all questions: "Who can know and trust his own heart?" (verse 9). To that, the Lord answers that He can know it. He can search it. He can try it (verse 10).[14] There remains always this immense consolation, which the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm voices so eloquently, that the Lord has searched us and knows us altogether. Jeremiah seizes on this assurance and utters the fervent prayer: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed, save me and I shall be saved. For thou art my praise" (verse 14). It is the only assurance, but it is the final one. To know that there is nothing hidden from His eyes, even the most secret faults, and to pray that His grace shall continually purge us from these, this is the hope and consolation of every one who seeks to know God and to speak for Him.

With verse 15, we must assume that this assurance has been born again in the soul of Jeremiah. Once more the sun has risen on his soul. And in the full consciousness that he does know God and speaks for Him, he turns upon his foes who have been taunting him and saying continually to him: "Where is now thy God?" He has never ceased to be a faithful undershepherd of the sheep. He has never desired disaster or the misfortune of his people. What came out of his lips has been before God's very face. And the moving passage ends with a prayer of deepest pathos: "Be not a terror to me, thou my trust in the evil day" (verse 17).

The imprecation which follows, to most thoughtful students of the book, is shockingly out of place. It contradicts too sharply all that has gone before it. Let us reverently close this deepest of all of the "Confessions" of Jeremiah with the seventeenth verse, and leave the prophet calm and still in the consciousness of the protecting love of God.

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[14] The succeeding phrases, "to give to every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings" occur again in chapter 32:19, and suit that passage, to which they may have been transferred, better than they do this.

A very different passage is the one to which we now turn. And here again we find imprecation, and this time we must face it and accept it. Chapter 18, verses 18-23, were evidently composed after some conspiracy against the prophet's life. His enemies are sick and tired of him and want to put him out of the way. "As in the case of Jesus, they take counsel together how they may put him to death."[15] Is it not the business of the priests to have charge of ritual and law? Is it not the function of the wise men and the duty of the prophets to safeguard the nation and to kill such heretics and traitors as this man Jeremiah? So they will lie in wait for him, watch him, trap him.

When the news of all this reaches Jeremiah, his heart is kindled within him. All the wrath of his soul mounts to the surface. Fierce indignation masters him. And he turns upon his foes and utters verses which literally seethe and boil in the terribleness of his anger. They end in a prayer that they may not be forgiven, but that they may be blotted out forever from the presence of the Lord.

That we have here one of the moods of the soul of Jeremiah ought not to be denied. To endeavor to take out these verses as unworthy of the prophet, or to soften them in the effort to reduce their dreadfulness is to be true neither to the text of the book as we find it, nor to the soul of Jeremiah as we have come to know it. Rather we should accept all this, admitting the possibility that later hands may have accentuated the language and added some poison to its phrases, and then seek to understand it. That the soul of Jeremiah was capable of these sudden influxes of moral wrath has already been made clear to us. That there was an admixture of personal resentment and of what doubtless we could call un-Christian feeling may also be admitted. Behind and beyond all this, however, and as the deepest source of this terrible moral indignation, lay Jeremiah's detestation of evil as it was personified in his enemies. Upon this point Dr. Skinner has written some very helpful words:

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[15] A. S. Peake, Vol. 1, p. 234.

> Individual men are present to his thoughts only as foes, persecutors, and despisers of God's word. He seemed to himself the one religious person in his generation, the only man who knew Yahwe and stood in immediate relation to Him. In this consciousness of spiritual isolation, it seemed . . . that the whole cause of Yahwe in the world hung on his . . . outward vindication in the sight of men. This is the explanation, even if it be not the justification, of his passionate desire for the discomfiture of his enemies. Either they must go under, or he; either they or he must be put to everlasting shame and confusion. And forasmuch as he was persuaded that the truth of God stood or fell with him, . . . he prayed with a good conscience that he might see Yahwe's vengeance upon them.[16]

Let it only be added that a tithe of Jeremiah's capacity for moral indignation would be a welcome addition to the moral equipment of many people to-day, who can view monstrous moral evil with only a shrug or a sigh and never know the purifying wrath of a son of God. Jeremiah lived in an age which permits us to make allowance for his desire for vengeance which seems cold-blooded and cruel. But

[16] *Prophecy and Religion,* p. 223.

men to-day have less to say for themselves who allow a complacent spirit of universal benevolence to dull the edge of their moral perceptions or to render them incapable of a Divine anger against blatant and unrebuked evil.

In chapter 16:19-20 there is a short, impassioned prayer, many of which must have fallen from the lips of Jeremiah. It reveals the closeness of his intimacy with God and his utter dependence upon Him, and it contains a beautiful vision of the day when even the "nations" themselves will come to see the vanity of their idols and worship God alone. These verses have a great importance in the development of Old Testament religion, since they definitely mark the transition from monolotry—in which the existence of other gods is conceded while the worship of Jehovah alone by the Israelites is insisted upon—to monotheism in which the existence of all other gods is expressly denied.

A final "Confession" of Jeremiah is found in chapter 20, verses 7-18. The passage may properly be divided into two sections, the first including verses 7-12, and the second, verses 14-18. Between these two stands verse 13, an evident interpolation which bears no relation with what precedes or follows.

These two sections bring together what were doubtless two separate "Confessions" of Jeremiah, written on two different occasions. Verse 14 does not follow appropriately verse 12. Their sense, however, is in general the same, and together they constitute

> one of the most powerful and impressive chapters in the whole range of prophetic literature, a passage which takes us not only into the depths of

> the prophet's soul, but into the secrets of the prophetic consciousness. For the psychology of prophecy there is nothing which is so instructive, nothing which displays so vividly the contact between the Divine and human element.[17]

The prophet is seen here expostulating with God. He feels that his mission is an intolerable one. God has beguiled him, intrigued him into undertaking it, has overcome him and he has yielded. As a result, he has become a common laughingstock, a human target for all kinds of insults and unjust accusations (verse 7). Whenever the urge of the Lord comes to him to speak, he is compelled to decry wrong and to predict violent disaster. As a result, he is an object of reproach and a constant derision (verse 8). Then he resolves that he will keep quiet, and forget God and speak no more in His Name. Yet no sooner has he decided thus than his heart, as it were, catches fire and burns, and try as he will to forbear, he cannot suppress the speech that bursts forth (verse 9). He is aware that even his most intimate friends are lying in wait for a chance to trap and denounce him. They are saying, perhaps he will trip and give us the power to wreak our vengeance upon him (verse 10). But he has the stronger consciousness that God is on his side, a mighty and terrible Force. So, it is his persecutors who shall stumble and fall, and not he. It is they who shall be involved in lasting disgrace (verse 11). And he prays the God who knows the sincerity of his own heart, that he may at least have the joy of knowing that God's cause has been vindicated and that His foes have been discomfited (verse 12).

There are those who feel that this desire of Jeremiah to see vengeance on his foes hardly suits the temper of the prophet's soul as revealed in what has preceded. But such people know little of the "violent surges and alternations of feeling in high-strung impressionable natures,"[18] and do not seem to realize that when the soul is in such a riot and tumult of emotion, it is capable of every kind of intense and even exaggerated expression of feeling. There is no more logic or consistency in such forms of spiritual excitement than there is in a seething maelstrom.

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[17] A. S. Peake, Vol. 1, p. 241.

For the student of the prophetic consciousness, the importance of this passage is apparent. He will observe how overwhelming is the sense that the Word which he speaks is not his own. Every human desire, and instinct rebels against uttering these maledictions upon the people. Yet he *must*. Every effort to restrain them is in vain. There is an inward compulsion which he cannot resist. To speak is to involve him in outward persecution and inward misery. Not to speak is impossible. So speak he must, and having spoken he will throw himself as it were in the arms of God, and fling his soul upon God's mercy in sure and lasting confidence.

With verse 14 there opens another of these extraordinary documents of spiritual self-revelation. Once more the prophet is found in a mood of profound depression. Like Job[19] he curses the day of his birth (verse 14). May the man who brought the tidings to his father suffer the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. He should have prevented my birth, or slain me as soon as I was born (verses 15-17). Why was I allowed to be born to spend a lifetime in shame, in labor and in misery? (verse 18).

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[18] Quoted by A. S. Peake, ibid., in loco., Vol. 1, p. 244.

[19] The reader will compare Job 3:3-12.

The similarity of this passage with that in Job is so striking that it inevitably raises the question of priority. That these passages were written independently of each other is not probable. The question therefore remains, which was dependent on the other? That this is an authentic description of an actual experience of Jeremiah seems to lie upon the surface. It fits perfectly all that we know of his moods of depression, his loathing of the rôle he was compelled to play, and his sweeping modes of expression, what we might call the exaggerated speech of the profoundly emotional man. The book of Job, we have every reason to believe, was not written until after the Exile. As we shall see, Jeremiah became the Saint of the exiles, the one who seemed to personify the suffering Servant who bore their iniquities and carried their sorrows. The writings of Jeremiah were known, read, pondered, and edited during the period of the exile. It is very reasonable therefore to conclude that the author of Job imitated Jeremiah. Moreover, if the two passages be carefully compared, it will be seen that the passage of Jeremiah is much more direct, human, authentic, and that the corresponding passage from Job is more "artificial and literary." The original passage was worked over by the author of Job, adapting it to his purpose, but losing thereby something of the human quality of the outburst of the prophet.

For an outburst it was. And however improbable, or exaggerated, or even grotesque it may seem to the one who reads the words without ever having had the remotest parallel to the experience which caused it to be written, it is true in every line to the spiritual agony which those endure who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. One cannot read the biography of any saint or prophet who has been literally immersed in the tragic mission of being the instrument of the Word and Will of God without coming across some passage which has its kinship with this *De Profundis.* And those of us who know nothing of it will at least rid ourselves of skepticism and scorn, and look with reverent eyes upon the spectacle of a suffering, which, it may be, we are not noble enough to share, or even to understand.

Thus ends the series of the "Confessions" of Jeremiah, these high debates between a human soul and God, which lay bare to us the inmost thoughts and feelings of the prophet, and the secrets of his prophetic experience. There is indeed nothing quite like them in the whole range of devotional literature. For while it is true that in the Psalter we find tender and intimate communings with God, here is the experience of a soul in "official relationship" with God, the record not only of a personal but of a prophetic consciousness operating under a direct Divine call and control.

The previous pages have indicated what these "Confessions" have been able to reveal concerning the nature of that consciousness. Two facts, which might seem to exclude each other, are clear. On the one hand, there is the overmastering conviction that the message uttered comes direct from God. On the other hand, there is the no less evident fact that Jeremiah was not robbed by this inspiration of his own proper personality. How human he remains! In these "Confessions" we see the moving spectacle of the strong man in his weak hour. In moments of conflict, he was strong. But when his strength had spent itself, he became self-conscious, introspective, "distinguishing between himself and God."[20] He is not an automaton. He does not resemble a medium. He is not in a trance. God speaks through him, yet it is through a very human personality that he speaks.[21]

Both the strong and the weaker elements in his religious life lie upon the surface of these "Confessions." The rock basis of his religious life is seen to be his absolute trust in the unerring righteousness of God, which is sure to vindicate itself in spite of all obstacles and in the face of all His foes. The dignity of human life is to be found in making itself the willing instrument of the Divine Will, its faithful interpreter and witness bearer, regardless of the results upon one's own personal happiness or fortunes. The only happiness which a true child of God has a right to expect is that of the sense of fellowship with God, of being in intimate communion with Him; and the confident knowledge that *in the end* that for which he contends is sure to come to pass. The motive animating every true worker for God must be a profoundly redemptive love which seeks only the good and ultimate salvation of those whom it seeks to guide and influence. In these few sentences may be summarized the strong and permanent elements in the religion of Jeremiah.

On the other hand, there is the weaker side. He does become self-conscious, and resents alike the treatment which he receives from God and from his fellowmen. He has an irritable temper, he is overmuch given to self-examination, and weakens himself in the effort to analyze his motives, and to discover if he had been faithless to his calling, if he had crossed the invisible line between holy zeal for righteousness' sake, and selfish devotion for his own vindication (15:11; 17:9, 10, 16; 18:20). Nor can we overlook the maledictions which he keeps hurling at his enemies, nor quite escape the conviction that there was a good deal of personal vengeance mixed up in all of this. The man seems also to be morose. The despondent note finally wears on us. We would welcome at least an occasional lift of the cloud of melancholy which hangs over these pages.

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[20] See Hastings: *Dictionary of the Bible,* art., "Jeremiah," Vol. II, p. 578.

[21] See chapter IV, pp. 43f.

It is only when we comprehend the condition of his life and work that we can recover from any attitude of criticism and find that we have only sheer admiration for this undaunted spirit. Never was a worker for God condemned to a harder lot. One king spared his life only because he was afraid to take it. Another king sought his counsel and refused to take it. Professional prophets were jealous of him and denied his right to speak for God. The priests were against him. The people whom he loved mobbed him for lack of patriotism. His brethren and his father's house betrayed him. He was "a man of strife and contention to the whole earth, [and] every one of them doth curse me" (15:10). And he did not live to see any solid results of his work. Under such circumstances, that the man did not rise above melancholy can hardly be charged seriously against him. That he rose always above discouragement, never lost his courage or his faith, was as dauntless at the end of his long life as at the beginning, proves him to have been one of this world's immortals.

In certain ways, these "Confessions" of Jeremiah mark a turning point in the history of Old Testament religion. As we have seen, they mark "the transition from prophet to psalmist." Prophecy culminated in him, and the Psalter dates from his influence. In him meet these two great streams of religious thought and utterance. Moreover, in these "Confessions" we find the beginnings of the speculative, critical element in Hebrew thought which finds its great example in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. Never before had Hebrew thought ventured to question or to challenge the ways of God with men. But the pages of the Old Testament, after Jeremiah had flung out his indignant protests, and asked his impatient questions, echo the idea that the ways of God are often past finding out. In these ways Jeremiah marks the end of one epoch and the opening of another.

Again, in his prayer life, we find the beginnings of what we must call a new religion. Hitherto, as every reader of the Old Testament knows, prayer had consisted almost exclusively of petition. Men prayed for good harvests, for victory, for deliverance. Men offered prayers of thanksgiving for favors received. Men prayed for forgiveness and sought for pardon. These down to the time of Jeremiah made up the burden of Old Testament prayers. No one can read the prayers of Jeremiah without realizing that he is in a new religious atmosphere. For the first time in Hebrew history, the petitional element in prayer falls into the background, and prayer assumes its highest form, that of intimate spiritual communion with God. Jeremiah's prayers are first of all intercessory. He prays for the people (14:7-9, 13, 17, 19ff.; 10:23, 24; 9:1; 13:17). These prayers, however, must contend with the persuasion that the punishment and doom of the people are inevitable. And it was doubtless his conviction that these prayers were rejected that drove Jeremiah to those deepest forms of prayer which have caused a great German scholar, Wellhausen, to call

Jeremiah "the father of true prayer." Prayer became for him the outpouring of his heart, the seeking of Divine help for direct personal needs. It is more than petition. It is intimate converse with God (15:15-18) "in which his whole inner life is laid bare, with its perplexities and struggles and temptations; and he unburdens himself of the distress which weighs down his spirit, in the sure confidence that he is heard and understood by the God to whom all things are naked and open."[22] His deepest prayer is that his own spirit may be cleansed, his own soul washed of every infirmity or selfish motive, that he may be a true witness for God (17:14-18). One who can offer such prayers as these is surely not far from the Kingdom of Heaven.

The experience of Jeremiah in one other respect marks a new point of departure in the history of Hebrew religion. For the first time religion becomes primarily and essentially a matter of personal and inward experience of God. This is not to say that before Jeremiah men had not had such an experience of God. They had had it in abundance. But for them, the knowledge and experience of God which they had had, was to have its vindication and illustration in the outward sphere of history, of political action, in the fortunes of the people of God. The holy men who preceded Jeremiah looked confidently for the results of their preaching and testimony in a reformed nation, a nation which, reformed and pardoned, would be established in righteousness and prosperity. That was the glowing vision which animated the heart of Isaiah and Micah. Jeremiah, however, as we have seen, cherished no such illusions. He found no satisfaction, no peace, no joy as he peered into his people's future. He saw nothing but the black clouds of a gathering disaster that was to bring irrevocable doom and ruin upon the nation. Jeremiah was thus driven from finding hope and consolation in the outward events of history, to the discovery of God in his own individual experience. The vindication of the prophet's truth was to be found not in the glory and permanence of the state, but in the joy of a newly discovered relationship with God, of which the pledge and assurance was to be found in his own personal experience. "Amid all the tribulations and the defeat of his lifework, it was a blessedness of which nothing could rob him that . . . the God of Israel had spoken to him and received him into his fellowship." [23] Cut off absolutely from religious fellowship with men, there remained only the God Who knew him and Whom he knew. Thus Jeremiah represents " a new spiritual type, the Old Testament saint: the man who, when heart and flesh fail, finds 'in God the strength of his heart and his portion forever' " (Psalm 73:26). Religion for him consisted solely in this consciousness of communion and fellowship with God. It was essentially a religion of the Spirit.

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[22] Skinner, op. cit., pp. 213-214.

The implications of this new definition of religion will be brought out in the succeeding chapters.

[23] Skinner, op. cit., pp. 219, 223.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE NEW COVENANT

### Jeremiah 31:31-34

JEREMIAH had discovered by the outward events of his own life that religion consists in personal fellowship with God. It was the secular history of the nation also which drove him to the conclusion that such is the reality of religion for all men everywhere. It was thus that he came to perceive "that what religion was to him it must be to all men—the response of the heart to the voice of God within."[1] Religion is the inward and personal experience of God. It consists not in obedience to external law, but in inward communion and fellowship with God. This is the profound truth which Jeremiah explicitly utters for the first time in the history of Hebrew religion.

The passage in which this truth is stated as the universal description of the reality of religion is rightly regarded as the most precious fragment in the whole range of the prophecies of Jeremiah. Here we find the earliest, and at the same time the nearest, approach to New Testament religion. These few short verses by themselves admit Jeremiah into the goodly fellowship of the greatest spiritual prophets the world has known.

The passage is undated. It is found in a chapter containing some material which may belong to the latest period of Jeremiah's ministry,[2] and much material not belonging to Jeremiah at all.[3] Thus only internal evidence can help us to place it in its proper period in the development of Jeremiah's religious ideas. It cannot belong to his earliest work. For it rests on certain fundamental ideas which presuppose much prophetic experience, which could have come only at the end of a long spiritual pilgrimage. Thus this saying about a New Covenant must be dated late in the career of the prophet.

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[1] Skinner, op. cit., p. 334.

The only question is, how late? It may belong to the very last utterances of Jeremiah. But, as we shall see, when we once enter the swift current of events which mark the close of his ministry, we are carried into a very maelstrom of turbulent happenings in the midst of which it is hard to find a place for this product of deep spiritual reflection.[4] There is, however, this brief period of calm following the first exile. To it, there is good reason to assign many of Jeremiah's intimate "Confessions,"[5] and these are in such close harmony with the spiritual tone of this great passage, that they may all well belong together in the same period of the prophet's life. We therefore date this passage soon after the year 597 B.C., early in Zedekiah's reign. It was the breakdown of every earthly hope which had driven Jeremiah back to find his refuge and his hope in fellowship with God. And it was the collapse of every aspiration for political independence and prosperity which caused Jeremiah to announce a new religious idea for the people as a whole.

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[2] Verses 1-6, 15-22.

[3] Verses 7-14, 23-30, 35-40.

[4] A possible period is the brief and peaceful interval after the destruction of Jerusalem while Gedaliah was governor. (See chapter XVII, p. 325). Many scholars assign this passage to that date. It is true that a few passages from these chapters may be assigned to this period, but it was too short to allow for much of Jeremiah's thinking and writing.

[5] See chapter XII of this book.

It is unfortunate that a passage as central as this, which lifts Jeremiah to the very summit of spiritual genius, which is the nearest Old Testament approximation to the teaching of Jesus, should be declared by some scholars not to belong to Jeremiah at all, and to be without the significance which is usually attached to it. One could have wished that a word as profound and meaningful as this could have escaped the cold and calculating eye of the critic. A review, however, of the reasons which have caused these scholars to reject this precious fragment reveals the limits of an historical criticism that is devoid of spiritual insight, and increases the confidence of that great majority of Bible students who find no single utterance in the entire book which more nearly expresses the heart and mind of the great prophet.

The argument that this passage finds itself in a chapter much of the material in which is doubtless by other hands, does not disturb us. For we have learned long since that the sayings of Jeremiah himself have nowhere in this book been set by themselves. To insist that the idea of a Covenant between God and man is foreign to Jeremiah's whole conception of religion is to misread a whole section of his prophecies, which is based on this very idea.[6] This idea was not the whole of Jeremiah's conception of religion. Doubtless even from the first, as we saw in the last chapter, he had made the discovery that the reality of the religious experience lies in immediate fellowship with God. But when he comes to speak of religion as a national institution, of the relation between God and His people, he uses naturally the idea of a Covenant between God and His chosen people which, from the earliest days of Hebrew religion, had been the central religious conviction of every true Israelite. To this extent, the idea of a Covenant, which the finding of the Book of the Laws had revived and intensified, was no more foreign to Jeremiah than to any other priest or prophet of the time.

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[6] A full statement of this will be found in Skinner, op. cit., pp. 321-324. See also George Adam Smith, op. cit., pp. 376-7.

Others have sought to show that the passage must belong to a period much later than Jeremiah's time, since by "Covenant" can only be meant the whole body of priestly and ritual legislation which was not compiled until the time of the exile. But to define the word Covenant in this fashion is pure assumption. Far more likely is that conception of it which carries it back to Sinai,[7] which identifies it in fact with the Decalogue itself.[8] Even more natural is to take the word "Covenant" to mean no special code or system of laws, but the general idea of a pact or agreement between God and His chosen people. The word is thus a metaphor, a figure of speech for a well-understood relationship, "a term classical in Israel and most intelligible to the generation whom Jeremiah was addressing."

Most extraordinary of all is that interpretation of the text itself which empties it of all spiritual meaning and makes it the dry and uninspired word of some old scribe. Thus instead of the beautiful word, "I will put my law in their heart," we are given to understand that the sentence should read, "I will make them learn my law by heart," and we are told that all the passage really teaches is that henceforth the prescriptions of the Levitical code are to be memorized. This is a grotesque caricature of the plain meaning of the passage, even if so notable a scholar as Duhm is responsible for it. And one is even more ready to believe that Duhm has lost his critical balance altogether in his effort to discredit the authenticity of this passage when one finds that he soberly asks the question "if God wanted to write His words on the people's hearts instead of on tables of stone, why did He not do so at first?"[9] One might as well ask, as Cornill has said: "Why, since Christianity is the highest form of God's revelation to mankind, did He not send Jesus at the creation?"

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[7] See Jeremiah 7:22, 23.

[8] For a full discussion of this, see *Expositor*, April 1906, art., "The New Covenant," Wilfred J. Moulton.

All who desire to explore further these intricate and eccentric critical theories may do so by reading the authorities to which reference has been made.[10] It may be safely assumed, however, on the basis of the most recent and competent scholarship, that in these immortal verses we not only have an authentic word of Jeremiah himself, but we have a word which none but Jeremiah could have written, a word which more nearly than any other lets us into the very heart of that idea of religion to which the whole trend of outward and inward experience had inevitably brought him.

Jeremiah began, then, just as the other prophets began. But he did not end as they had ended. He began, when he spoke of the national religion, with the familiar idea that God had made a Covenant with His people. That Covenant roughly was as follows: Jehovah will be the God of His people. The formula is, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." As their God, He will be their Protector. He will assure to them victory over their foes, national independence and prosperity, His good will and favor. On the other hand, the people engage that they will give their exclusive loyalty to Jehovah and to no other god. They pledge obedience to His Will as they were taught by Moses and the prophets. Such was the agreement. And Jeremiah at the beginning of his career declared, as all other prophets had declared before him, that the people had not kept their pledge. They had broken their promise. They had not observed their part of the Covenant. In a word, they had broken faith with God. As a consequence, God could not and would not keep faith with them. There was only one hope. There must be deep, widespread, permanent reformation. The people must turn back to God, give Him their undivided allegiance, return to His obedience. In this way only could disaster be averted, the national independence be preserved, the kingdom of David be set on lasting foundations.

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[9] A. S. Peake, ibid., Vol. 2, p. 106.

[10] See also A. S. Peake, Vol. 2, pp. 101-104.

It was at this point that all other prophets before the time of Jeremiah had ended. But Jeremiah did not end there. He was urged forward, as we have seen, by two irresistible convictions, which grew stronger with every year of his ministry, until they became the overwhelming spiritual persuasion of his soul.

The first of these was the conviction that the nation was doomed, that the destruction of Jerusalem was sure, that nothing could avert that dire and final punishment of the people which God was preparing, and of which the Babylonians were to be the human instruments. As we have seen, this persuasion involved both the preaching and the praying of Jeremiah in a tragic contradiction. Why urge the people to repent when in the next breath he must warn them that nothing could now stay the onrush of the Babylonian enemy? Why pray that the people should be spared when in his inmost heart he knew that the catastrophe was inevitable? But though preach he must and pray he did, the old hope that had animated the hearts of the earlier prophets, that through a national repentance the kingdom of their fathers would be preserved and perpetuated, had vanished forever for Jeremiah. The disillusionment of the Reform of Josiah had been complete. The old Covenant was forever gone. It was impossible to revive it. The people this time and not Moses had taken the Decalogue into their hands and had so effectively broken and destroyed it that never again could it be pieced together. The very foundations on which the old Covenant had rested had been forever destroyed.

In addition, however, to this conviction, there had been growing another. Jeremiah was becoming gradually convinced that the people were incapable of a truly spiritual reformation. He had probed with a keen eye to the source of their evil doings and he had discovered the root and source of it to lie in an heart and will so utterly corrupt as to be incapable of righteousness.[11]

False above all is the heart,
  And sick to despair,
  Who is to know it?
I, the Lord, searching the heart,
  And trying the reins,
To give to each man as his ways
  As the fruit of his doings.
Can any man hide him in secret
  And I not see him? [12]

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[11] Jeremiah 17:1, 9ff.; 8:6, 7; 13:23.

[12] *Jeremiah,* trans. George Adam Smith, published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York, pp. 108-109.

How was it reasonable to expect that a people in such a condition of spiritual degradation could out of hand make up their minds to return to the Lord and do His Will? In their present state, such moral action was not only unlikely but inherently impossible. The difficulty lay deep. Moral suasion and exhortation had lost all point and meaning. Short of an utter change of heart and disposition, it was futile to hope for reformation. The scene of action for Jeremiah had shifted from the external conditions of life, to the deepest and most inward region of the soul. Except the heart were reached and touched and changed, there lay no hope for religion. If religion were to survive at all, it must survive there.

> When the rotten surface of the national life . . . broke under the Prophet, he fell upon the deeper levels of the individual heart and not only found the native sinfulness of this to be the explanation of the public and social corruption, but discovered also soil for the seed-bed of new truths and new hopes.[13]

Jeremiah never lost hope of the ultimate restoration of Israel. But that hope lay henceforth not in a reviving of the Old Covenant, but in the substitution for it of a New. Let one follow carefully the gradual development of these two convictions in the mind and heart of Jeremiah, see them grow in strength and certainty, and one is led surely and steadily up to that proclamation of a new religious hope and ideal which forms the inevitable climax of his religious experience.

That proclamation of a New Covenant is found, as we have seen, in a chapter which contains much else. Chapter 31, verses 1-6, 15-22, contain two prophecies which may belong to this same period, and predict the restoration of the Northern tribes. Verses 7-14 belong to a later author, probably writing during the exile, to whom we owe the editing of chapters 30, 31 as a whole. He speaks as if the return from the exile were imminent. To the same author are to be ascribed verses 23-26, probably verses 35-37, and certainly verses 38-40. "This is anti-climax indeed. It is hardly likely that a prophet like Jeremiah would have concerned himself with the future boundaries of Jerusalem in this minute way" (Peake in loco). In the midst of all of this, lies our precious fragment, the announcement of that New Covenant wherein the religious hope of the whole people alone rests. Truly "we have this treasure in earthern vessels."

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[13] George Adam Smith, p. 368.

The text of this short, immortal passage presents few difficulties. "Thus saith the Lord, The hour cometh and now is when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; a covenant which they broke, the broken covenant which caused me to reject them" (verse 32). The reader will consult the Bible dictionaries for a full discussion of the idea of a Covenant. It all rests on the assumption, familiar to antiquity, that a god chooses its clan or tribe, between whom and it there exists henceforth a peculiar relationship. Jehovah had thus chosen the Israelites as His people, and the relationship between them had been ratified at Sinai. It was Israel's incorrigible disobedience which had released Jehovah from His obligation to the people, and the old Covenant of Sinai was abrogated, and the national existence of the people came to an end. Hence a New Covenant will be provided for the salvation of God's remnant, one which will go deeper than its predecessor and provide against the failure which had overtaken the first.

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*Verse 31.* The expression *make* a covenant, literally means to *cut.* The reader will refer to Genesis 15:7-18, and compare Jeremiah 34:18. *With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.* It is apparent from verse 33 that by Israel is meant the whole people. In this verse therefore, "with the house of Judah" is probably an insertion by the editor who wished to emphasize the fact that Jerusalem is to be restored. Note that the New Covenant, like the old, is with the nation, and not with the individual. *Verse 32. In the day that I took him by the hand,* like a father guiding his child who is learning to walk. Cf. Hosea 11:1-4, a passage with which Jeremiah was doubtless familiar, and Isaiah 40:11, 41:13, 42:6, 51:18. The beautiful metaphor had become a classic. *I was an husband.* A slight emendation of the text yields the meaning "I abhorred" which gives the better sense, "and I abhorred them." This reading is adopted by most modern scholars. *The fathers* doubtless refers to the generation which came out of Egypt, and their rejection finds its culmination in the Exile. One is not justified, however, in inferring that therefore this passage must have been written after the exile. For the dispersion of the Northern tribes had taken place long before Jeremiah wrote, a calamity that is never absent from his consciousness, and the captivity of Judah was at last imminent when this passage was written. *Verse 33.* "But this is the covenant which I will make with the children of Israel after these [calamitous] days are passed, saith the Lord. I will set my Law [no longer on tables of stone but] in their inward part, and I will [continue] to be their God, and they shall [continue to] be to me a people."

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The prophet, it is true, gives no explanation of what the new and better law is, neither does he explain the process by which it is to be written on the hearts of the people. The passage, to be understood, therefore, must be read in connection with what Jeremiah had already taught about the spiritual regeneration of the people. "The spiritual summit which he reached was not attained by sudden flight. It was but the end of a long journey."[14] It would indeed be futile to write a new law on hearts that were still unregenerate. But all along Jeremiah had taught that the heart itself could be renewed and the moral nature transformed. Thus, in chapter 4:4 he had spoken of the circumcision of the heart. More explicitly in 24:7 he had plainly stated the Will and Power of God to give the people a heart capable of knowing Him, so that with all their soul the people would turn unto Him. Thus, in this great announcement that the law will be written on the heart, this new and regenerate heart is presupposed. "In this regenerate personality [shall] reside the eternal principles of religion and morality as the spring of all action."[15] Instead of external obedience to an outward code, an obedience which must always be rigid, formal, mechanical, there will be the obedience that will spring out of a renewed heart, from a native and inward impulse, and thus love itself will be the fulfillment of the law.

Thus God will continue to be the God of His people. Thus the people will continue in a new covenant relationship with their God. Thus the problem which had become an intolerable one, how to preserve the bond between a holy God and an incorrigibly sinful people, was solved by this doctrine of a New Covenant. The people remain the religious unit; the Covenant is always that between God and His people. But religion has become a matter for the individual. Because each separate individual became the possessor of a personal experience of God, the nation composed of those individuals became a permanently religious nation. The further implications of this idea may have lain beyond the vision, as it lay beyond the immediate purpose of Jeremiah. But to us it is clear that the outlines of a truly universal religion are thus disclosed. Everything that was national, and temporal, could be destroyed. But religion, as the inward moral and spiritual experience of God, must survive not only as the religion of one people, but of all the children of God.

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[14] See Longacre, *A Prophet of the Spirit,* chapters VI and VII.
[15] A. S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 106.

> And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least of them even to the greatest, saith the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more (verse 34).

As things are now, the prophet says, the knowledge of God must be transmitted externally and orally, transferred from mouth to mouth. "But in the blessed time to come, this knowledge will be the property of each, an inward possession implanted by God Himself who gives to all from the least to the greatest an heart to know Him" (Peake). This "knowledge" is evidently not being familiar with the requirements of the ceremonial law. Rather the prophet means that the people will learn to know God just as he has learned to know Him, in their own inward and personal experience. And this knowledge of Him, direct, personal, intimate, will cause them, just as it has caused him, to be God's faithful and obedient servants. It is to be a repetition in the moral experience of the whole people, of his own experience of God.

The phrase "to know God" is often on the lips of Jeremiah. No one can ponder his writings without discovering what those words meant to him. He does not leave us in any doubt. One can know the law, and not know God (2:8). No one can pretend to know God while he still continues in wrongdoing (4:22, 9:3, 6). Only that man knows God, who practices in his own life the righteousness, the loving-kindness and the justice of God (9:24), who is found on the side of the poor and the needy (22:16). To know God one must have a pure and regenerate heart that turns to Him in loyal obedience (24:7). In a word, it is not an outward, an external knowledge, that comes through tradition and finds its expression in a formal way unaccompanied by living the life and doing the Will of God. To know God is to have a personal and vital experience of Him that influences and controls the whole course of one's life and becomes the source and the spring of all his moral action.

And when thus the whole nation comes to know God, its every sin will become forgiven, the past will be forgotten, and the blessedness of a complete fellowship with God will be their external inheritance.

The historical importance of this doctrine of the New Covenant is apparent to every one who knows his Bible. In the terrible days of the exile, following the final destruction of Jerusalem, no passage in all Jeremiah contained such immortal hope as this assurance of the New Covenant whereby God's relation to his people was preserved. We find echoes of it all through the prophets of the exile. Thus, the great unknown prophet of the exile calls upon the people to bear bravely their present lot, and not to fear the reproach of men, in the sure knowledge that God's law has been written on their heart. The moth may destroy the garment and the worm the wool, but the righteousness of God that is implanted in their hearts shall be forever, and hence salvation is sure to all coming generations (Isaiah 51:7, 8). And Ezekiel is plainly echoing the spiritual promise of Jeremiah when he declares that God will give the people a heart and put within them a new spirit and take away the stony heart, in order that they may walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances, and thus continue to be God's people (Ezekiel 11:19, 20).

Thus this doctrine of the New Covenant entered into the inmost consciousness of the Hebrew people and became their inalienable possession. Nothing ever really robbed them of it. It became their solitary but their shining hope. Centuries were to pass, however, before it came to its final and permanent fulfillment. And then this Truth rose in its beauty and power, and, in the person of Jesus shed its rays of hope not only upon Israel but upon all mankind. For the New Covenant of Jeremiah in its essence, is indeed the New Testament itself. In the Gospel we find in every detail the completion of the majestic hope of the prophet, who, in the darkness of his day saw but one solution of the tragic situation in which his people had become involved. They must be given a new heart. And this new, regenerate heart was born out of the love and sacrifice of the Lamb of God. There must be a new Covenant, and the New Covenant was the Covenant of His body and blood.[16] Henceforth to obey God meant no keeping of an outward law, no merely external requirement; it meant "the new and living way" of loyal obedience to a living, loving Savior, Whose service is perfect freedom. Thus the contradiction between God's Holiness and man's sinfulness was forever put away. Thus a fellowship with God more profound, more intimate, more joyful, more victorious than the world had ever known was made possible not only for the people of Israel but for all men everywhere.

The persuasion that in Jesus this most spiritual of all the ideas of the Old Testament had found its perfect fulfillment, finds frequent expression in the New Testament writers. "For this is my Covenant unto them," cries Paul, "when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11:27). But it was left for the inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews boldly to quote the wonderful prophecy of Jeremiah in the prophet's own language as the proof of that New Covenant through Christ (Hebrews 8:9-13). He transcribes in full the verses just as Jeremiah wrote them. And they need no commentary from him. They speak for themselves. Read in the light of the Christian Revelation, they are their own interpreter. One can only pause in reverence at the thought that six centuries before the coming of Christ, to Jeremiah in his loneliness, his isolation, in the midst not only of every personal misfortune but watching the destruction of everything that the Hebrew people had forever held dear, it was given to announce a spiritual teaching so profound, so universal, so true, that it could be quoted when Christianity had begun to take root, a century after the birth of Christ, as the perfect description of the Gospel that meant salvation to all mankind.

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[16] Cf. the Institution of the Lord's Supper, St. Luke 22:20.

> In the great company of those who by divers portions and in divers manners prepared the way for Jesus, no voice rang truer, no hand wrought surer, no heart beat purer, than the voice, the hand, the heart of Jeremiah.[17]

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[17] Longacre, ibid., p. 139. Cf. Peake, I, p. 46. "It was the supreme achievement of Israel's religion, and its author was the loftiest religious genius who adorned the line of the prophets."

# CHAPTER XIV

## JEREMIAH AND ZEDEKIAH

### I

Date, 597-594 B.C. Chapters, 13:18-19; 22:24-30; 23:1-8; 24; 16:10-21; 29; 27; 28; 23:9-40; 51:59-64.

JEHOIAKIM was succeeded by his eighteen-year-old son who assumed the name of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6; Jeremiah 22:24, 24:1). It was a brief, pathetic reign of only three months. Nebuchadnezzar himself had now arrived on the scene, and the net was being drawn tighter and tighter about the beleaguered city. One after the other, the cities outside of Jerusalem were abandoned to their fate (Jeremiah 13:19), and Egypt was powerless to come to the assistance of the Judæans. Seeing that their condition was hopeless, the city surrendered as soon as Nebuchadnezzar appeared before it (597 B.C.). Jehoiachin was carried away into Babylon, and with him went the best elements in Judah, the princes, the priests, and the aristocracy. In addition, the Babylonian king carried away thousands of warriors and artisans. To pay the heavy tribute, palace and Temple were looted.[1]

Thus, only a poor and inconsiderable remnant of the people was left behind. As ruler over this disorganized and disrupted people, Nebuchadnezzar placed the youngest son of Josiah, known to history as Zedekiah. The situation called for one who could bring some semblance of order out of chaos, and preserve what was left of the Southern Kingdom. But Zedekiah proved to be one of those weak and vacillating characters, who have good intentions, but lack the strong will power to overcome opposition and carry out in the teeth of difficulty what they know to be the right course of action. For the Hebrew nation as such had not yet been destroyed. The Babylonians had not been ruthless conquerors. A firm administration might have built up on the foundations that had been left the structure of a state which would have outlasted the storms which threatened it. But Zedekiah lacked the energy and the courage which the situation demanded.

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[1] See Kent, *A History of the Hebrew People*, "The Divided Kingdom," pp. 190ff., and Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, art., "Jehoiachin."

Thus a new chapter opens in the political and spiritual career of Jeremiah. He no longer has to deal with an uncompromising and bitter foe as in the case of Jehoiakim. The task which he now faces is that of persuading a weak and irresolute king to take the only course which can save either himself or his people. To this task Jeremiah proceeds to address himself with unbroken courage. The story of how he made the effort and how he failed, adds another chapter to his melancholy career, but lifts the character of the man himself to new heights of spiritual splendor.

1. Chapter 13:18-19. Jehoiachin. To the brief reign of Jehoiachin who ascended the throne after the death of his father, may be assigned three short passages from the writings of Jeremiah. It appears from these that the real ruler for this period of three months was not the young boy king, but the queen-mother Nehushta (see 2 Kings 24:8). To the mind of the prophet, it has been, therefore, a change of

name only. The old policies, the old régime, these have continued unaltered. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that the invective directed by Jeremiah against Jehoiakim is now leveled against the queen and her son, and that the same doom is predicted for them. In chapter 13:18-19, we find a brief poem referring to this unhappy young king. It was probably written at the beginning of his reign and "describes the success of the guerrilla bands of Chaldeans in cutting off the southernmost cities from contact with Jerusalem:

Say to the king and queen-mother,
"Sit low in the dust!
For down from your heads is fallen
The crown of your pride!
The towns of the Southland are closed,
With none to open!
All Judah is gone into exile—
Clean swept away!"[2]

Again, in chapter 22 we find two short prophecies directed against Jehoiachin. The first of these (verses 24-27)[3] suggests that the young king was a favorite of the people, and that he was welcomed as a release from the tyranny and shortsighted policy of his father. Jeremiah, however, is not deceived. Though he were as precious as a signet ring, still the Lord will pluck it off and cast it away. And when, in the second of these short prophecies (verses 28-30) this has actually happened, and Jehoiachin has been carried away into captivity by the Babylonians, he is contemptuously referred to as a broken image, a useless vessel. No man of the seed of Jehoiakim was fit to sit on the throne of David. Jehoiachin may not actually have been childless, but at least he had no royal successor. No son of his was to be heir to the throne.

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[2] Skinner, op. cit., p. 249.

[3] Verse 25 is so diffuse that it may be an editorial expansion of the preceding verse.

2. Chapter 23:1-8. The Messianic King. Following this prophecy concerning Jehoiachin, there is a section in chapter 23:1-8, which is also concerned with the rulers of Judah. No individual ruler is named as in the preceding chapter, but in verse 6 (see below) there is a veiled allusion to Zedekiah, and we should naturally expect the series of prophecies which deal with the rulers of Judah to close with one on Zedekiah. The tone of this prophecy is much milder and more sympathetic than those in chapter 22; for Jeremiah well knew that Zedekiah was but a weak tool in the hands of the politicians who surrounded him, and that personally he did not favor the policies which he was compelled to follow. Thus, the first part of the section (verses 1-4) pronounces its woes against the rulers as a class and not against Zedekiah in person. The last four verses (5-8) contain a beautiful prediction of the ultimate restoration of the True Israel under a spiritual successor of David. Some scholars have denied that this prophecy belongs to Jeremiah, but their reasons are not conclusive. Jeremiah never lost hope in the final salvation of the people (24:5, 6; 31:16, 17; 32:36-42). One of the most glowing characteristics of the Bible is its fundamental note of hopefulness. Dean Church of England once said that the Bible from beginning to end is one unbroken call to Hope. One can find plenty of evil in the Bible, and struggle and defeat, but one cannot find despair. The heroes and heroines of the Bible may be faulty in other respects; but every one of them is a matchless example of hope. If one were to look for hopelessness anywhere in the Bible, one would look for it here, when

what was left of the nation was tottering on the brink of ruin; if one were to expect despair to seize the soul of any Old Testament character, Jeremiah would be the man who labored at the zero hour of Hebrew history. But here, shining through the blackness that enveloped the visible horizon is this piercing ray of light, that sees a restored and spiritual people under the sway of a righteous king.

This whole passage has especial importance since it is the only use made by Jeremiah of the Messianic Idea[4] which forms such a continuous and prominent part of Old Testament prophecy as a whole. Its roots lay in two fundamental convictions which were never far from the Hebrew consciousness. The first of these was an idealization of the reign of David which, in perspective, seemed to be the halcyon days of the Hebrew people who maintained a strong and united national life for the first and almost the only period of their history. Again there was the irrepressible hope, flaming up from the depths of national misfortune and disruption, that the kingdom of Israel would one day be restored under an ideal king who would rule the people in righteousness, stand in a peculiar relation to God as His representative and mouthpiece, and usher in an era of political prosperity founded upon the true principles of Israel's religion. In part this conception was political. No Hebrew thinker, and even Jeremiah is no exception, was able wholly to separate the ideas of religion and of material and political welfare. Hebrew religion always conceived of the nation's "communion with God as mediated through temporal blessings among which are included the political blessings of good government and a measure of earthly might and dominion."[5] But the idea of the Messiah was not wholly imperialistic, nor the product merely of a narrow nationalistic ambition. It was attended and surrounded by an intense and beautiful religious imagination as the well-known passages in Isaiah (9:6, 7, 11:1-9) plainly indicate. The Messianic Idea was a political conception bathed in religion, or a religious conception visualized in earthly conditions. And the Messiah was both an actual ruler of an earthly kingdom, and a Divine Figure embodying the Word and Will of God.

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[4] On this subject the reader will consult: Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, pp. 310-319; A. B. Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 309-376; George Adam Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, pp. 146ff.; Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, art., "Prophecy."

That Jeremiah in the course of his long preaching should have made use of an idea which lay so near the surface of all the religious thinking of his time is most natural. That he should have used it only once shows how subordinate the idea was in his whole conception of religion. Jeremiah conceives of religion primarily as an individual and spiritual relationship between the soul and God. He does not on that account, however, completely abandon the universally accepted Hebrew idea of a restored people living in peace and equity under the ideal king. Yet no one can read this passage without perceiving how little he has to say, as compared with the prophets who preceded or who followed him, about national prosperity or dominion. He speaks rather of a quiet, happy people who at last have learned to live in righteousness, with a ruler who, springing out of the family of David, shall cause the Law of God to be the law of the land.

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*Chapter 23: verse 1. Shepherds* i.e. rulers as in 22:22. Ezekiel must have been familiar with this passage, since the whole of Ezekiel 34 is an amplification of it. *Verse 3. Remnant,* i.e. the exiles. *Verse 5. Behold the days come.* A favorite expression of Jeremiah. It occurs no less than sixteen times in this book. Its first appearance in the Old Testament is in Amos 4:2. *Verse 5. Branch.* We should read "shoot," i.e. that which springs from the ground. Some have sought to make this a collective term, to refer to a line of Messianic kings. But the context shows that an individual is meant, and the sequel proves that Zechariah so understood it. Jeremiah's reference to the Messiah as a shoot of David gave his authority to an idea that was made much of by later writers. See Zechariah 3:8, 6:12. *Verse 6. The Lord our Righteousness.* The Hebrew of this name is closely allied with the original Hebrew name of Zedekiah. "What Zedekiah's name set forth as an ideal would be realized fact in the time of the Messianic king" (Peake in loco).

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[5] Skinner, ibid., p. 317.

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3. Chapter 24. The Parable of the Figs. We must now imagine, as well as we are able, the situation in Jerusalem after the first captivity in 597 B.C. The city is shorn of its leaders, of its nobles, of its priests, of its aristocracy. Only an ignorant, base and conscienceless remnant of the people is left behind. It is a dismal and apparently hopeless situation in which Jeremiah finds himself. No wonder, then, if to his mind the future of Israel lies with the exiles and not with the rabble in Jerusalem. No wonder if, to his thinking, the future hope of Israel which always glows like a bright if distant beacon light in the midnight of Israel's history, is to spring out of the Israel in Babylon, and not out of what was left in Zion. From now on, we shall find the thought of the prophet shifting

from one scene to the other. Now he is concerned with what the exiled community in far-away Babylon is thinking and doing. Again he is concerned in the events that are transpiring in Jerusalem. Yet always it is clear that Jeremiah expects the coming Restoration, the true Israel, to come out of Babylon and not out of Jerusalem. And history fully vindicated his judgment.

This comparative estimate of the worth of these divided sections of the Jewish community is found in a striking parable, contained in chapter 24, which must be assigned to this period. This simple little prophecy comes to Jeremiah in the form of a vision. "The Lord showed me, and behold two baskets of figs." It may well be that Jeremiah, in walking about the streets of Jerusalem, actually saw two such baskets of figs, just as he had seen the almond tree or the cauldron (chapter 1:11, 13) on the day of his call to be a prophet, or the potter at his wheel (chapter 18:2, 3). So again it was the Lord who caused him to see the baskets, caused him to see them with different eyes, to see in them a different and deeper significance. In describing the meaning of what he saw, the prophet passes, as usual, easily from verse to prose, for the first six verses of the chapter only are in poetic form, and the rest in prose. Presumably the people who were left behind at Jerusalem were guilty of the sin of self-complacency, and not only congratulated themselves on their escape but assured themselves also that it must have been because they were the children of destiny that they were left in Jerusalem. It is to shatter this state of mind and to tell them the truth of the matter that this prophecy was spoken. There is probably a reminiscence of the passage in Amos 8 with which Jeremiah was familiar. The meaning of the little parable is so plain that it requires no comment. The good figs are the captives in Babylon. The rotten figs are the remnant in Jerusalem. In the exiles lies the future hope of Israel. But the people left at Jerusalem are to be "a reproach, a taunt and a curse." And so indeed they proved to be.

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*Verse 2.* The first ripe figs were considered to be a great delicacy (cf. Isaiah 28:4, Hosea 9:10, Micah 7:1, Nahum 3:12). *Verse 8. "Them that dwell in the land of Egypt."* These words must refer to the exiles taken into Egypt after the battle of Megiddo along with Jehoahaz and to those who fled to Egypt when Jerusalem surrendered to the Babylonians.

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4. Chapter 16:10-21. In this section we have some short undated and miscellaneous prophecies. At least two of them probably belong to the period of Zedekiah's reign, and the sense of 16:10-13 follows admirably after 24:10. We therefore consider the whole section at this point. It opens with a prose passage, verses 10-13, which recite in a conventional manner the approaching doom and exile of the nation. Verses 14 and 15 are out of place, and they are repeated verbatim in chapter 23:7-8, where they belong. Verses 16-18 predict the arrival of fishermen and hunters, invaders who will sweep the country clean of its inhabitants and ferret out every last individual because of the idolatries with which they have polluted the land. In verses 19-21, we have a beautiful detached prophecy, the date of which is unknown, in which the prophet predicts the conversion of the heathen from their idols. This is unique among the

prophecies of Jeremiah, and it takes rank, with the book of Jonah, as one of the spiritual high watermarks of the Old Testament. The nations shall come to Jehovah with the confession that the idolatry of their fathers was vanity and a delusion, since a man cannot make unto himself gods that are no gods.

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*Verse 13. There shall ye serve other gods.* This of course was not the belief of Jeremiah, since he knew that there were no "other gods." It is a statement of the popular belief that to change one's nation involved a change of religion also (1 Samuel 26:19). *Verse 16.* The two figures of speech refer to a single catastrophe, the capture of the towns of Judah, and at last of Jerusalem itself (a mass capture like fish in the net), and the capture of fugitive individuals who are run down, as hunters ferret animals out of their hiding places; cf. Amos 4:2; 9:1-4; Habakkuk 1:14-17; Ezekiel 12:13; 29:4, 5). *Verse 18. Double;* cf. Isaiah 40:2. The two passages are probably connected, the prophet of the exile drawing on his knowledge of this prophecy by Jeremiah. *Detestable things,* i.e. the false gods: their lifeless corpses pollute the land. Cf. Leviticus 26:30.

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5. Chapter 29. Letter to the Exiles. Jeremiah was convinced that the future national and spiritual history of the Jewish people lay with the exiles in Babylon. Their stay there was not to be a brief one. On the contrary they were to remain until they had learned with thoroughness the lessons which they needed to be taught, until they had been trained by the discipline of this tragic experience. All of this

naturally contradicted the expectations of the exiles themselves. They doubtless viewed their banishment as merely temporary. So long as Jerusalem stood, Jehovah as its Protector would procure its salvation. That salvation could hardly rest with the motley crowd which had remained there. It must rest with them. Therefore Jehovah in some way would conspire to bring them back. The exile would soon be over, the tyranny of Babylon would soon be ended, and the reunited communities would establish once more an independent state (29:8-10). Such must have been the general mood of the exiles.

If, therefore, Jeremiah was to succeed in winning his argument that the disaster which had overtaken the people was final, until the time came in the distant future when the Messiah would restore a purged and ransomed remnant to be the nucleus of a redeemed and righteous people (verses 10-14. See chapter 23: 5-8), this expectation must be removed from the minds of the exiles. He therefore composed and sent them a remarkable letter. This letter is preserved for us in chapter 29. It is a remarkable letter not only because it reveals the invincible spirit of Jeremiah and his great influence, but because of the light which it throws upon an important transition in Hebrew theology. Consequently we shall need to study the chapter with particular care.[6]

The authenticity of the letter has been denied by some scholars, but recent commentators have recognized that the core of it is historical. "The detailed references to persons and events can hardly rest on imagination, and the situation to which the letter is addressed is entirely natural . . ." (Peake). It does not follow, however, that we have the letter just as it came from the pen of Jeremiah. Here also the expanding hand of subsequent writers and editors is to be found. Verses 16-20 belong without doubt to a later author. They have no connection with the purpose of the letter. Why should Jeremiah suddenly break off from dealing with the situation in Babylon and write about conditions in Jerusalem? Verses 16-20, moreover, read as if Jerusalem had at last fallen, as if the final dispersion had taken place. Why a later writer should have inserted the passage here is not clear. Possibly he imagined that such a condemnation of the remnant at Jerusalem would be a suitable addition to Jeremiah's message to the exiles at Babylon.

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[6] The date of the letter is not given. It was doubtless sent quite early in Zedekiah's reign when the exiles had been only a short time in Babylon. It must have been written earlier than 594 B.C., since in that year (chapter 51:59) Zedekiah, instead of sending messengers to Babylon, went there himself. For this reason, we must place this chapter before the incidents recorded in chapters 27-28.

It is evident therefore that the letter has undergone considerable editorial expansion. In general, verses 1-15, 21-23, seem to have come directly from the memoirs of Baruch. Verses 16-20 are an editorial insertion; and verses 24-32 include some editorial material. It is not necessary, or perhaps possible, to analyze this with any degree of precision.

The letter to the exiles contains, then, a message from God. God bids the exiles to settle down in their homes, to marry and rear their families. They are not to oppose Babylon. Rather they are to live with their captors in peace. Only after a long interval are they to be restored. But the time will come when their prayers will be heard, and they will be gathered back again to their homes. And they are not to be deceived by the "false" prophets who tell lies in God's name. These men are to be delivered into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and they are to die terrible deaths because they have spoken lies in His Name. Verses 24-32 recount an interesting sequel to this letter. It seems that Shemaiah, one of the "false" prophets in Babylon, wrote to Zephaniah, the overseer of the Temple at Jerusalem, remonstrating with him for his negligence in permitting Jeremiah to write such a letter. Thereupon Zephaniah reads Shemaiah's message to Jeremiah who replies by predicting that Shemaiah, for punishment, will leave no posterity to witness the final return of the exiles to their homes.

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*29:3.* "The object of this diplomatic mission is unknown; perhaps it was in charge of the yearly tribute" (Peake). *Elasah* was apparently the brother of Ahikam (26:24), and of the Gemariah mentioned in 36:10, 25, who endeavored to prevent the burning of the roll. Of the Gemariah mentioned here we know nothing more. From the fact that these men consented to carry his letter, we infer that they were friendly to the prophet. *Verse 6* suggests that at least some of the exiles had refused to "marry and settle down." *Verses 7-8* presuppose a natural hatred of Babylon by the exiles. They are to put this out of their hearts. Yet how strange must have sounded in their ears to "Pray for the peace of Babylon"! The expression *"cause to be dreamed"* (verse 8) is extraordinary. People do not usually "cause" dreams. Moreover, it is not the dreams of the exiles but the dreams of the prophets on the basis of which they base their prophecies that Jeremiah condemns. The text is probably corrupt. The sense is: "neither hearken ye to their dreams which are merely an invention." *Verse 10.* This verse ought not to be omitted as some scholars suggest. The figure seventy is a round number, meaning a long period of time. God's real purpose is not a hostile one. The exiles must have confidence in the ultimate love and good-will of God. *Verse 21.* This verse completes the sentence begun in verse 15. *Verse 23.* Jeremiah's prediction that these "false" prophets would be burned to death could not have been based upon the fact of their immorality, since even the Jewish law reserved this terrible fate for only the most heinous vices (Leviticus 20:14). Neither is it likely that Nebuchadnezzar would have punished them in this fashion for telling lies in the name of their God. If they actually died like this, therefore, it must have been for treason or for blasphemy against the gods of Babylon. The expression "wrought folly" commonly, although not exclusively, applies to sins against chastity (Genesis 34:7, Deuteronomy 22:21, Judges 20:6, 2 Samuel 13:12). *Verses 24, 25.* Nothing is known of Shemaiah beyond what we learn in this passage. Zephaniah was twice sent by Zedekiah to Jeremiah to ask for a prophecy (21:1, 37:3), and was among those executed by Nebuchadnezzar after the capture of Jerusalem (52:24-27, 2 Kings 25:18-21). *Verse 26. Every man . . . prophet,* i.e. every man who is mad enough to call himself a prophet, or, every man who by madness pretends to be a prophet (2 Kings 9:11). The great prophets knew nothing of these ecstatic states. But Shemaiah is convinced that Jeremiah must be a lunatic. Zephaniah does not put Jeremiah in the stocks as his predecessor Pashhur had done (20:1-3) but he does take Jeremiah to task by reading Shemaiah's letter to him. *Verse 31.* Apparently communication with the exiles was easy and frequent.

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Such is Jeremiah's letter to the exiles. It reveals an unbroken will, an indomitable spirit in the midst of national disaster and disruption. The soul of Jeremiah rises above the calamities of the hour and shines clear and bright in the chaos and gloom which enveloped the people whom he loved. Moreover, he holds fast to the idea which must have seemed so disloyal to his countrymen that their safety and destiny lay in submission to a hated and tyrannical foreign power. No wonder if his motives were misunderstood. No wonder that the man was feared and hated and disliked. Convinced, however, that this was the Will of God, he neither hesitates nor equivocates. History does not possess a finer example of moral courage. Nothing can daunt the faith of this intrepid man. He refuses to think of himself, to compromise with truth, or to regard the consequences. Standing on the brink of doom, we see the man erect, by the sheer force of his will breaking down all opposition and impressing even those who hated him by the passion of his sincerity, by his unerring devotion to the Truth as God had given him to see it and to know it.

The passage, however, has a further importance. It illustrates a profound transition which was taking place in the minds of Israel's great teachers and prophets respecting the relation of God to His people. The old, popular idea was that God's sovereignty was limited to a particular land and to a particular people. Every nation had its god, and the jurisdiction of that deity was confined to that land and people. Thus when Ruth refused to leave Naomi and migrated from Moab to Bethlehem, she realized that if she changed her land, she must also change her religion. "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). This popular idea had persisted all through the subsequent history of the Hebrews. One profound reason for Isaiah's faith that Jerusalem would not be captured by the Assyrians was that Jehovah could not desert Zion without confessing His impotence. The defeat of God's people and the capture of God's city could only mean that other gods were stronger than He.

Of course, this idea must not be pressed too far, or applied too rigidly. That prayer, for example, can be offered to God from foreign lands appears on the surface of the oldest narratives in the Pentateuch (Genesis 12:8; 21:33; Judges 16:28; 2 Samuel 23:17) and Elijah in a Phoenician town wrought a miracle by prayer to Jehovah (1 Kings 17:20ff).

When, however, in this letter, Jeremiah assured the exiles that God was as near to the devout Israelites in Babylon as to those who still worshiped Him in Jerusalem (29:11-14), and that although in Babylon they are still the objects of His love and have a share in His purpose of redemption, he was stating something new in religion. Jeremiah's idea is not that although absent from Jerusalem they may still retain some shreds of their former faith. Rather it is that they have as complete access to God through prayer as their compatriots who worship in the Temple at Jerusalem. Jeremiah evidently foresees the coming destruction of Temple and city, and the total discontinuance of worship in Palestine. But Jeremiah through his own personal discovery of religion as consisting essentially in the individual experience of God, boldly announces that that experience is as possible in Babylon as in Jerusalem. In a word, when religion is conceived as Jeremiah came to conceive it, as the experience of God, it is at once liberated from all limitations of geography and of national frontiers, and becomes universally possible anywhere.

In the enunciation of this high and spiritual principle, Jeremiah rises above all pre-exilic teachers of religion. Never were even the most spiritual of them able to conceive of religion apart from the state. Hence, "their supreme aim was to preserve the state as the indispensable basis of religion." But Jeremiah who saw with unerring vision the approaching dissolution of the state is driven to the discovery of a deeper and more permanent basis of religion, and this he finds first for himself, and then for his people, in the experience of God possible for every soul that draws near to Him in contrition and in faith. This principle was of course latent in the pre-Exilic prophecy. When Amos declared that religion means righteousness; when Hosea arrived at the still loftier conception that God's nature must be defined in terms of love; when the Deuteronomists declared that religion is holiness, they all laid the foundations of a universal religion, since Holiness, Righteousness and Love are not coterminous with any national frontier. But what was latent in their teaching, became explicit in Jeremiah's. He carried this idea of the universality of the religious idea to its logical conclusion, and made the approach to God independent of land or city, or Temple. God may be known as truly and as completely in Babylon as in the Holy City. Thus Jeremiah became the spiritual forerunner of Ezekiel and of the great prophets of the exile, who swept the old popular theology completely away, and taught that other gods have no existence and that Jehovah, the God of Israel, is indeed the God of the whole earth. In a real sense, also, he is the forerunner of Jesus, who taught in final terms the truth of the utter spirituality of all religion:

> But the hour cometh and now is when neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. . . . God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.[7]

To such spiritual conclusions Jeremiah points. It would not be true, however, to say that to such conclusions he had arrived. Even Jeremiah, as we have seen, was unable to conceive of a future for religion that did not presuppose a future for the state. The religion to which he so confidently looks forward still has its roots in the national soil. It is a redeemed people in a redeemed land who are to preserve and perpetuate the true faith and bequeath it to the world. What he impresses on the exiles in his letter is only this:

> that while the Babylonian domination lasts, their religion must be of the purely spiritual and denationalized character here described, while he cherishes the expectation that the ultimate embodiment of religion will be in a new Israel established before the eyes of the world on its ancient soil.[8]

Thus Jeremiah is a pioneer in the discovery of that spiritual religion of which Jesus is the final teacher and exemplar.

6. Chapters 27, 28. The Other Prophets. It is not surprising that this teaching of Jeremiah was

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[7] St. John 4:21-24.

[8] Skinner, ibid., p. 296.

unwelcome and unpalatable and that it should have aroused popular indignation and resentment. There were not lacking men claiming to be prophets who stoutly denied the truth of this preaching of Jeremiah, and sought to rouse the people at Jerusalem to resist it. Why should they be called "rotten figs" and acquiesce supinely in the belief that they were to continue to be a subject people? Why should the exiles be told to accept their situation and settle down in Babylon as if they belonged there instead of in Jerusalem?

The situation which thus discloses itself is full of dramatic interest. Jeremiah becomes the spokesman and advocate of a defeatist policy. He must have seemed intensely unpatriotic to his countrymen. Already he had incurred the hatred of the princes and the people alike by so freely predicting the victory of their foes from the North. And, now that the calamity had overtaken them, to assert that the only hope for the future lay with the exiles who must meekly submit to their rôle as captives, and that the people at Jerusalem in the eyes of the Lord were as so much rubbish to be swept away, must have seemed a detestable doctrine. No wonder that the man who was guilty of such teaching was hated and execrated. No wonder that people looked upon him as a dangerous lunatic. No wonder that there rose up prophets in Jerusalem who openly protested against such teaching and proclaimed on the contrary that the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar was soon to be thrown off, and the independence and prosperity of Jerusalem was to be regained. The clash between Jeremiah and these other prophets is described for us in chapters 27 and 28, and even the casual reader can feel the force of it. The account is evidently taken from the memoirs of Baruch, to which, especially in chapter 27, much supplementary material has been added by the editor. In chapter 27 these prophets are treated as a class, and in chapter 28 we read of Jeremiah's encounter with an individual. There are other differences. Chapter 27 is written in the first person and is longer and diffuse in style, whereas chapter 28 is briefer and in the third person. But there is no question that they both refer to the same period (see 28:1) and deal with the same general situation. They deserve careful reading. For here we discover a situation demanding the utmost moral courage, and this we find exhibited to a striking degree in the words and attitude of Jeremiah.

Chapter 27 begins with a glaring error. Instead of the word "Jehoiakim" in verse 1, we must read "Zedekiah,"[9] as in verse 1 of chapter 28. When Jehoiakim began to be king, no such situation existed as is described in chapter 27, which accurately reflects the condition of affairs at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah. Moved by the teaching of the other prophets who sought to arouse the "patriotism" of the people to a belief that Babylon could again be defied, Jeremiah adopts the method which twice before (13:1, 19:1, 2, 10) he has employed to show the people in dramatic fashion how confounded and false are their hopes of deliverance. The Lord tells him what to do. This is not his own choice, his own desire (28:6). But he is at the mercy of the Divine Will. He is the instrument and mouthpiece of the Divine Word. So, he takes bands and bars and makes a yoke of them and fits the yoke to his neck. At this time, there were messengers in Jerusalem from the kings of Ammon, and Tyre, and Zidon, who had doubtless come to plot rebellion against Babylon, and,

[9] So Revised Version, margin.

pointing to the yoke upon his neck, Jeremiah publicly bids them to go back to their masters, and tell them that all these lands, including Judæa, have been given by the God who owns them and can do with them as seems right to Him, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. God will punish all those who refuse to submit to Babylon until they have been exterminated. All who call themselves prophets and tell the people not to submit to the Babylonians are prophesying a lie and shall be destroyed. Only that nation shall be saved which shall bow the neck to Nebuchadnezzar. And then follows a personal appeal to Zedekiah to resist the false prophets who keep saying that the Temple vessels will shortly be restored, and the Temple worship resumed as it was. On the contrary, the vessels that are left shall be carried away and remain at Babylon until the Lord's own time shall come for the restoration of Jerusalem and the return of His exiled people.

In such fashion, alone, single-handed, Jeremiah confronts hostile prophets, a vacillating king, an indignant and outraged people. We see Jeremiah, undaunted, the yoke about his neck, his voice reverberating with conviction and passion, surrounded by a wrathful mob.

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*Chapter 27* from an editorial point of view presents many difficulties. Just what portions of it belong to Baruch and what are later additions it is difficult to determine. Into these questions it is not necessary for us to go. *Verse 3. And send them.* Only one yoke is mentioned. Moreover this was not actually sent since later on (28:10) Jeremiah is wearing the yoke himself. It is better, then, to omit the word "them" from this verse. Jeremiah sent a message, not a yoke. *Verse 6. The beasts of the field.* This seems like a strange addition. But compare Genesis 1:26-28 with Psalm 8:6-8. See also 28:14. It is a conventional Old Testament phrase to describe God's ownership of all creation. *Verses 7-8* are probably a later addition. *Verse 9* contains a rhetorical summary of the whole class of "false prophets." All of these will prophesy smooth and easy things but they are not to be trusted (cf. 1 Kings 22:5-28). *Verse 12.* The use of the personal pronoun here and in *Verse 16* is surprising, since in the preceding verses the Lord is the speaker and Jeremiah the one who receives the message. We should expect instead the words: "And thou shalt speak." *Verse 22.* It seems strange that a prediction that the vessels shall ultimately be brought back should be uttered in the same breath with the threat that they shall be carried away. These words are omitted in the LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament. On the other hand, Jeremiah did believe, as we shall see, so fervently in the ultimate restoration of a godly community of people that it is not impossible that he should have uttered his faith in it at this time.

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Chapter 28 contains a story of Jeremiah's encounter with Hananiah, one of the "false" prophets. It is taken, without evident interpolation by the editor, from the memoirs of Baruch. From verse 1 it is clear that this incident took place soon after the event recorded in the preceding chapter. Hananiah publicly addressed Jeremiah in the Temple area and told him that the God of Israel had revealed to Hananiah that within two years the yoke of Babylon was to be broken, the vessels of the Lord's house were to be returned, and Jehoiachin was to be restored to the throne. Jeremiah replied that he desired with all his heart that what Hananiah had prophesied might come to pass. But history proved that those prophets who had prophesied woe, had prophesied truly. And only when it was proved that a prophet who prophesied peace had prophesied truly, could he be believed. Then Hananiah in a moment of passion broke the yoke which Jeremiah still wore on his neck as a sign that God would break the yoke of Babylon from the neck of the nations.

"And Jeremiah," we read, "went his way (verse 11). But that is precisely what we would expect Jeremiah would not do. It is inconceivable that he was shaken in his conviction by the dramatic action and evident sincerity of Hananiah. And in such emergencies Jeremiah has never been found wanting. To remain silent and to leave the field in the possession of Hananiah must have created a false popular impression. It may be that we have here an incomplete or faulty record of what happened. Most modern scholars solve the difficulty by the simple process of striking out the words. If this is done, the word "Go" in verse 13 means (see 39:16) little more than "speak," a conventional formula used of one who is entrusted with a message. When Jeremiah did reply, his answer to Hananiah did not lack force or decision. He asserted that the Lord had firmly riveted the yoke upon the neck of the nations, and he predicted that within a year Hananiah himself would die because he was a false prophet. Before three months has passed, the prophecy was fulfilled. "The fact of his death is to be accepted as historical" (Peake in loco).

Thus, once more faith had won the victory. But the triumph of Jeremiah was short-lived. He stands, as it were, with his back to the wall, fighting valiantly. But his enemies keep closing round him, while, at the same time, disaster envelops the city and the final doom of the people draws near.

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*Verse 1. Hananiah.* We know nothing more of him than is told us in this chapter. *Unto me.* The words should be stricken out since all the rest of the narrative is in the third person. *Verse 3.* Why Hananiah chose two years as the term of the Captivity we do not know. Probably he did not know either. *Verse 4. Jeconiah* (cf. 24:1). Another form of Coniah, the name of Jehoiachin before his accession as king. One wonders how Zedekiah relished this prediction that he was to be deposed and Jehoiachin given the throne once more. *Verse 6.* Jeremiah's language is not sarcastic. He wishes as devoutly as any patriot in the land that the state might be restored. But his personal preferences do not blind him to the Will of God. *Verse 7.* The passage has its importance since it indicates the persuasion of Jeremiah that he stood in the succession of the pre-Exilic prophets whose pessimism concerning the people was a characteristic element of their message.

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7. Chapter 23:9-40. True and False Prophecy. The careful reader of these chapters must have asked himself the questions: How did Jeremiah *know* that the other prophets were wrong and that he was right? How could he know that they were false prophets and that he only was a true prophet? What told him with

such certainty that Hananiah was deceived and was uttering a lie? That Hananiah was sincere there can be no question. That he was speaking what with all his soul he felt to be the truth no one can deny. When he struck the yoke from Jeremiah's neck, he was yielding to an uncontrollable impulse as certainly as Jeremiah yielded to such an impulse when he put it there. What is to show that the one impulse was of human and the other of Divine origin? That Hananiah was the victim of a trance, but that Jeremiah was the instrument of a Divine purpose? Why is it that Hananiah mistook the thoughts that possessed him in a self-induced state for Divine revelation, whereas Jeremiah was the actual mouthpiece of the Will of God?

These are interesting and intricate questions concerning the very nature of prophecy. It was an old problem in Israel.[10] Much light is thrown upon it by the latter part of chapter 23 (verses 9-40) which should be read in connection with chapters 26 and 27. A careful study of this passage seems to furnish us with some criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophecy:[11]

(1). At least some of these other prophets who claimed to know "the Will of God," were men of immoral life (23:13-14; cf. 29:23), and by their example encouraged the very evils which true prophecy condemned and sought to abolish (23:15). Doubtless some of these prophets, of whom Hananiah may well be one, were decent and respectable men, but the company they were in tended to discredit their teaching.

(2). These other prophets were, generally speaking, indifferent to the evils in the social and religious life of the people (23:17). And this indifference to iniquity stamps them as impostors when they venture to speak in the name of a righteous God. To be a true prophet it is necessary oneself to be righteous and to hate and condemn all unrighteousness (23:22).

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[10] See Micah 3:5-12; Isaiah 28:7-13; Ezekiel 13:1-16.

[11] See Skinner, ibid., pp. 190-200; George Adam Smith, ibid., pp. 258ff.; A. B. Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 285-308. Cf. Jeremiah 28:6ff., 29:26ff.

(3). The teaching of these prophets is as faulty as their character. They base their predictions on the old tribal relation between God and Israel, and on that low level conclude that God cannot forsake his people whom He is bound to defend, under any circumstances. To assert that God will turn against His own people is thus to them both blasphemy and treason. Jeremiah, on the other hand, declares that God cares supremely for holiness and righteousness and that if His people forswear these, He must forswear them. Thus the ethical cleavage between Jeremiah and the other prophets is clear and profound. They say "peace" when there can be no peace (23:17, 28:9). They are willing to condone iniquity, and they have not the moral courage and insight to make the Righteousness of God the basis of their message, whatever the consequences to the people may be.

(4). Thus the prophecy of Jeremiah was distinguished by its intellectual sincerity. He would not allow the straightness of his vision to be deflected or disturbed by the personal or social consequences of his insistence on righteousness as the basis of any true relation to God. Whereas, the other prophets, taken at their best, were constantly being blinded by their "patriotism." This came first, and other elements in the situation were bent and warped as the occasion demanded. But with Jeremiah, the regnant and tragic Will of God, which sprang out of a conception of His nature as grounded in Holiness, came first, and he accepted the results whatever these might be. As we have repeatedly seen, Jeremiah found the necessity of uttering a message that dashed the hopes and cruelly disappointed the natural aspirations of the people, personally repugnant (23:9, 28:6). He had an inner reluctance to speak that was overcome only by the pressure of the Divine Will upon him. The other prophets, however, were under no such compulsion. Their tongues wag easily (23:31) and they toss around their words which run of themselves and are not sent (23:21).

(5). A more difficult point is that of the nature of the prophetic psychology. "Jeremiah holds that the other prophets were either deluded or dishonest in their use of the traditional forms of prophetic revelation" (23:30, 32, 14:14). In other words, he feels that there is something in the nature of his inspiration which differentiates it from the lower forms of inspiration of the other prophets. They lived in the old semi-heathenish forms of prophecy (23:27, 28, 32), repeated formulas now obsolete, and trusted to forms of ecstasy that had no ethical basis and were not rooted in a true communion with God. We look in vain, however, in the words of Jeremiah, for some fixed standard of judgment by which one may distinguish between true and false forms of prophetic inspiration. He defines his own relation to God in striking metaphors (23:18, 21, 22, 28, 32), but these do not contain any clear statement concerning the nature of a genuine inspiration. He has, in a word, "no *psychological* test by which true prophecy can be distinguished from false." He has to fall back on that certainty of his own experience of God which is self-evident and self-revealing. This sense of certainty has been his since the day of his call to be a prophet.

It has never deserted him. It has supported him at every crisis of his career. It has mastered his whole nature. It has been vindicated again and again in the historical event.

> It is this which gives him the assurance that the truth which he perceives, whether it came to him through a vision, or an audition, or by direct spiritual intuition, is a revelation of the mind and will of [the Lord]. This immediate consciousness of having the mind of God is the ultimate secret of true prophetic inspiration. . . . It is strictly analogous to the experience of religious certainty in general.[12]

The answer, and the only ultimate answer to the question, "How do you know?" is this: "I know because I know." This is the final position of Jeremiah concerning the essential truth of his inspiration as a prophet. And in that assurance he looks down in scorn and contempt on what he knows to be the selfish, spurious, and superficial inspirations of other men (23:28ff).

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*23:9.* The prophet is reluctant to utter the Divine displeasure. *Verse 10. Swearing.* Better, the curse. *Verse 16. Teach vanity,* i.e. fill you with vain hopes. *Verse 18.* This must evidently be altered since, as it stands, it is a denial of the very ground on which Jeremiah bases his Divine authority. The sense of it would be given by reading "who of them" (i.e. the false prophets). *Verses 19 and 20* are probably a later insertion. They are found (with slight variation) in 30:23, 24. *Verses 23-24.* The false prophets would hardly deny that God saw them, and was acquainted with their doings. The idea of the passage is that prophecy is no such easy matter as these men seem to make of it. A true prophet shrinks from his task. But God's eye singles him out and does not allow him to escape from his mission; cf. Numbers 12:6-8. *Verse 28.* The dream and the Word of God are to be sharply distinguished, "for the straw has nothing to do with the wheat, the worthless stubble with the Bread of Life" (Peake in loco). *Verse 33.* From this point on, there has probably been a good deal of editorial expansion. The Lord has thus far tenderly borne His people (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 1:31, 32:11; Hosea 11:3), but He is now weary of His burden and ready to fling it off. The prophet of the exile describes Him as prepared to take it up again (Isaiah 46:3, 4).

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[12] Skinner, ibid., pp. 195, 196.

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8. Chapter 51:59-64. The Doom of Babylon. The "Letter to the Exiles" in which Jeremiah counsels submission to Nebuchadnezzar and asserts that the peace of God's people is identical, for the time being at least, with the peace of Babylon, raises the inevitable questions: What was Jeremiah's attitude toward this great pagan empire? Did he really look upon it with favor? Did he believe that it was exempt from the universal condemnation in which all other pagan peoples were involved? That Jeremiah believed with all his heart that Babylon was God's chosen agent for the just punishment of His own people is clear. For years this had been his passionate religious and political conviction. Since the earliest days of his ministry, his eyes had been fastened on the North out of which the scourge was to come that should chastise and chasten a recreant people. After

the battle of Carchemish, Babylon had leaped out of its political obscurity as the clearly divinely appointed instrument of the wrath of God. Nothing could shake Jeremiah's conviction that the people's resistance was futile and could end only in their complete destruction. Safety for the present, salvation for the future, lay in nonresistance to their just and inevitable punishment at the hands of the Babylonians. But what did this belief involve with respect to the Babylonians themselves? Because they were the agents of God's wrath, were they therefore to be the objects of His mercy? Because they were to carry out His Will, were they therefore to receive His pardon? Because God's people were not to resist the rule of Babylon, did it follow that Babylon no longer resisted the rule of God? These questions must have pressed upon the minds of the exiles after they had read and digested the letter which Jeremiah had sent them. Doubtless echoes of these inquiries reached Jeremiah at Jerusalem. Taught from infancy to regard all the pagan nations as the symbol of irreligion, as the antithesis of faith, as the incarnation of evil, how were they to understand this message from Jeremiah, that they were to live in peace and good-will with those whom every instinct of both piety and patriotism had taught them to believe were the foes of their nation and religion?

It was to answer this question that a later message was sent to the exiles. As we have seen, the sending of these messages was not a difficult matter. Embassies were constantly passing backward and forward between Babylon and Jerusalem on all kinds of political errands. Such an embassy is described for us in chapter 51:59. It seems that Seraiah, the chief chamberlain, was to accompany the King Zedekiah on a mission to Babylon. It has been surmised that Zedekiah undertook the journey to convince Nebuchadnezzar that Jerusalem was still loyal, and had no part in the intrigues of the surrounding nations to revolt. This has been denied. It has even been denied that Zedekiah went to Babylon at all. But these matters need not detain us. There is no reason to doubt that Seraiah made the journey and that he took this message from Jeremiah to the exiles with him. Seraiah, as we learn by comparing the account of his ancestry given here with 32:12, was a brother of Baruch, and therefore a friend of Jeremiah, and it was natural that Jeremiah should entrust a message to him. In order to answer the question of the exiles, "Is Babylon in God's favor and the object of His mercy?" in the most emphatic and final manner possible, Jeremiah adopted by proxy the theatrical method he had so frequently used himself in Jerusalem. He wrote a scathing denunciation of Babylon on a scroll which he gave to Seraiah. On his arrival at Babylon, Seraiah was to read the words Jeremiah had written to the exiles, and then he was to take the roll and sink it to the bottom of the river Euphrates saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink to rise no more."

In other words, Babylon still remains outside the pale. Because the Babylonians have been used by God to punish the people of God, they do not themselves become the friends of God. Irreligion remains irreligion. Unfaith is still unfaith. Evil may be used as an agent of God's Will, but it does not therefore become righteous. No less than the other nations, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Egypt, Babylon is an outcast, destined to sure and final destruction. It has simply been singled out to be used by God, for a moment, as a flail with which to thresh God's wheat, dividing the chaff from the grain. When it has performed this task, it will be thrown from the Divine hand as a useless and reprobate thing. The final doom of Babylon is as much a part of God's purpose as its temporary employment for the execution of His Will.

The ethical problem presented in this apparently paradoxical teaching is one with which we are all familiar. It is the age-long question of how the wrath of man can be used to work the Will of God. That it does so, lies on the surface of history. That the children of light are at times to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness is recognized by Jesus Himself. That evil is used to work out ultimate righteousness can neither be questioned nor denied. The solution of this problem leads one to the mysteries of the ultimate clash between human freedom and the Divine Will. It is the obstinacy and recreancy of the human will which necessitates these strange uses of evil to bring righteousness to pass. But for selfishness, pride, and greed, universal Peace, for example, might long ago have come on this planet. It is conceivable, a century from now, that men shall date the beginnings of a moral movement resulting in World Peace from the terrible crime of the World War. If so, the World War may well be described as the agent of the Divine purpose for the punishment of a race which had flagrantly disobeyed God's plain Will and Word, and for the bringing of the race to its moral senses and so to its ultimate salvation. No less will that war itself be forever the object of His hate and indignation.

We saw in chapter XI of this book that the long prophecy against Babylon contained in chapter 51:1-58, and forming the finale of a series of prophecies against the nations, is spurious. That it may contain here and there bits of Jeremiah's own writing is possible. But these fragments are so questionable, and the difficulty of detecting and detaching them is so great, that there is no use in making the attempt. To the editor, it doubtless seemed that the list of prophecies against the nations was incomplete without the inclusion of Babylon. So one was inserted, the length of which should correspond with its importance.

To argue, however, that because this long prophecy against Babylon is not Jeremiah's, therefore we cannot accept the message in chapter 51:59-64 as belonging to the prophet, is to go much too far. As we have seen, there is every reason why Jeremiah should have sent this message to the exiles who needed it to clear up their thinking about Babylon, and the content of the message and the method of its use are strictly in accord with all that we know of Jeremiah's mind and ways.

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*51:59. "Chief chamberlain,"* i.e. quartermaster. This official would have charge of the halting places where the embassy would pass the night. *Verse 60. Took* i.e. the scroll. *Verse 62.* "This verse interrupts the connection between 61 and 63 and presents other difficulties . . . and should be regarded as a later insertion" (Peake in loco). *Verse 64.* This should end with the words, "The evil that I will bring upon her." The words "And they shall be weary" are no part of the utterance of Jeremiah; and the words "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah" are a gloss, the notation of a scribe.

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# CHAPTER XV

## JEREMIAH AND ZEDEKIAH

## II

Date, 594-586 B.C. Chapters, 21; 34; 37; 32:6-15, 24-26, 36-44; 33:1-9; 38; 39:15-18; 39:1-14; 15:5-12; 30:12-15

We do not find anywhere a connected account of the events of Zedekiah's reign of eleven years.[1] Yet the material which we possess is sufficient to enable us to understand the general trend of events. Zedekiah, a weak, well-meaning, vacillating monarch, is urged in two opposite directions. On the one hand, he is beset by the patriotic party, supported by the "false" prophets, who do their utmost to persuade him to revolt against Babylon. On the other hand, Jeremiah throws the whole weight of his tremendous influence against such a course, and urges the king to continue his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. Not knowing which way to turn or which course to follow, Zedekiah leans first this way and then that, until he reaches his fateful decision which results in the final destruction of Jerusalem and captivity of the people.

The original name of Zedekiah was Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17). When Nebuchadnezzar set Mattaniah on the throne, he changed the name to Zedekiah, which means Righteousness or Truth of Jehovah,

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[1] In the fifty-second chapter of the book of Jeremiah, we have a repetition of the chronicle given in 2 Kings 24:18-25:21, 27-30, with the addition of three verses (28-30) derived from other sources. This appendix to the book was added by the editor. Other references to Zedekiah's reign to be found in the book are connected with definite episodes in the career of Jeremiah.

> intending thus to bind the Jew by this name of His God to the oath of allegiance which he exacted from him. When Ezekiel afterwards denounced Zedekiah on his revolt, it was for "despising the Lord's oath and breaking the Lord's covenant" [2]—a signal instance of the sanctity attached in the ancient world to an oath sworn by one nation to another, even though it was to the humiliation of the swearer.[3]

Nebuchadnezzar, however, had not reckoned with the power of fanaticism. He had removed all the political and military leaders, and he had put on the throne a man whom he believed to be too weak to plan revolt. But there still slumbered the fires of hatred, of discontent and fanatical belief in the strength of Zion. The people who had been left behind believed themselves to be the saving remnant that should restore the nation to independence. They despised the exiles, "for unto us is this land given for a possession." [4]

Through the early uneventful years of Zedekiah's reign, these glowing embers were gradually fanned into flame by the "false prophets." [5] The nationalistic sentiment was strengthened by the arrival in Jerusalem of messengers from the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Zidon, who brought word that they were ready to rebel.[6] Back of all this seething discontent was Egypt which had never been willing to accept as final the decision of the battle of Carchemish, and still hoped to overthrow Babylon, and herself become the mistress of the East. Against all these intrigues, Jeremiah threw himself with all the passion of his nature. For a time he succeeded in controlling the situation, and the spirit of revolt which rose high in the earlier years of Zedekiah's reign seems to have died down as suddenly as it arose. The conspiracy collapsed, whether through Jeremiah's influence or from some other cause. It may have been to clear himself from implication in this conspiracy that Zedekiah sent the embassy to Babylon, headed by two of Jeremiah's friends.[7]

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[2] Ezekiel 16:59, 17:11-21.

[3] See George Adam Smith, ibid., pp. 232-3.

[4] Ezekiel 11:15.

[5] Jeremiah 28.

[6] Jeremiah 27:1-4.

Then follows a period of about five years (592-587 B.C.) in which we have no definite information concerning the state of affairs in Jerusalem. We must imagine that during this period the anti-Babylonian party had again gotten the upper hand. At any rate, in the year 588 B.C. the open revolt was made. This time Nebuchadnezzar moved swiftly, and within a few months Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonians. Realizing their desperate situation, the king and all the people of Jerusalem made a solemn vow that if they were delivered, they would give freedom to all those slaves who had reached their seventh year of service. But when, owing to an advance by the Egyptians, the siege was temporarily raised, the Jews broke their promise and pressed their enfranchised slaves back into service once more. Thus the people proved themselves hopelessly corrupt, and their merited doom was not long delayed. Egypt once more failed to fulfill her pledges to her allies. Her armies were forced back by the Babylonians who reinvested Jerusalem. There followed one of the most terrible sieges in history. Although weakened by famine and disease, Jerusalem held out for a year and a half, by a fanatical and desperate exhibition of endurance. Then came the end. The walls were forced, the city was captured and destroyed. The king was blinded and carried off to Babylon, and with him nearly all the people who had survived the siege. Only a beggarly remnant of the community remained, "the poorest of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen." [8] Jerusalem was no more; the nation had ceased to exist.

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[7] Jeremiah 29:3.

This part of Jeremiah's life is crowded with stirring incidents. We behold him seeking to hold back the growing fanaticism of the people, much as a man single-handed would try to hold back an avalanche which has begun to slide. He never weakens although it is quite evident that the impending disaster will overwhelm him as well as the people. He continues to treat Zedekiah with a deference and sympathy which he never showed to Jehoiachin; for he recognizes the difficulty of his position and the weak rather than the wicked qualities of his nature. On his side, the king honored and revered the prophet and placed great confidence in his character and counsel. More than once he saved him from death, and he probably recognized that his own destiny was safer in the keeping of Jeremiah than in the hands of the "other" prophets. Yet he was unable to prevent the fate that overtook him. All of these elements make up a story of the highest possible dramatic interest.

1. Chapter 21. This chapter is wholly out of its chronological order. Belonging to the very latest period of Jeremiah's life, it is here set down in the earlier part of the book. We have here simply another indication of the queer editing of Jeremiah's memorabilia. It has been suggested that the placing of the passage at this point is due to

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[8] 2 Kings 25:12.

the purely verbal coincidence[9] that the name of Pashhur occurs in chapter 20:1, although the Pashhur of 21:1 is an entirely different person. Possibly also the passage was inserted here as a fitting close to the series of prophecies on the last kings of Judah.

Not only, however, is the passage out of place; it is also not a unity as it stands. Material has been inserted which does not belong to the period to which most of the chapter refers. It is possible that the address to the people in verses 8-10 was not originally connected with the reply of Jeremiah to Zedekiah found in verses 1-7. It is certain that verses 11-12 belong to an earlier date when reform was still possible (cf. 4:1, 22:3).[10] Verses 13-14 are a detached fragment, probably belonging to Jeremiah, but certainly not referring to Jerusalem at all, which could never be called an "inhabitant of the valley" or a "rock of the plain." Some other unidentified town must be referred to; and why this fragment was inserted here, we do not know.[11] We limit our attention, therefore, to chapter 21:1-10.

The city was besieged by the Babylonians, and the irresolute Zedekiah did not know what to do. So he sent certain of his officials to Jeremiah to ask him to discover what is the Will of God, and to pray that the siege may be lifted and that the Babylonians may be removed. But Jeremiah sent back word to Zedekiah that the Will of God is that the people of Jerusalem shall be impotent to drive the enemy away. Instead God will compel them to retreat within the city; God will fight against His own people in power and anger, and they shall die of disease and starvation. The remnant shall be taken away into exile, and the city shall be destroyed by fire. The date of this incident is probably 588 B. C.

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[9] See Peake in loco, Vol. 1, pp. 246-247.

[10] See chapter IX, p. 121, note.

[11] See chapter XI, p. 165.

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*21:1.* The Pashhuh of this verse is to be distinguished from the Pashhur of 20:1, who had probably gone into captivity with Jehoiachin. *Verse 2.* Jeremiah, of course, was well aware of the situation which is here explained for the information of the reader. *Verse 4.* The siege had begun but had not progressed so far as to prevent the Jews from making sorties against the enemy. *Verse 6.* Pestilence was always dreaded during a siege. It was caused by the congestion of population and animals. *Verses 8-10.* These verses doubtless belong to the same period, but probably were not spoken on the same occasion. The message which Jeremiah sent back to Zedekiah he afterward openly uttered in the ears of the people. *Verse 8* reminds us of Deuteronomy 11:26, 30:15. The words are here given a different and secular interpretation. *Verse 9.* The victorious soldier looks forward to the spoils he will take. If the Jews surrender to the Babylonians, their bare lives will be all they can expect to save. They will lose everything else which they possess.

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It is not necessary to dwell on the extraordinary courage demanded of Jeremiah to send such a reply to Zedekiah, and to make such an announcement to the people at this acute political crisis. We reserve for future discussion the question of the justification of such a course of conduct. The amazing thing is that Jeremiah was not mobbed and summarily executed as a traitor.

2. Chapter 34:1-7. The incident described in this section is so similar to the one which we have just studied, and with chapter 37:4-10 which will be considered later, that some scholars believe all three to be different accounts of the same incident. As a matter of fact, the similarities are on the surface. What is more natural than that during a stretch of two years of the gravest political happenings, Zedekiah should have sent repeatedly to ask Jeremiah's intervention and help? Can we doubt that during that crisis of two years the distracted king would send more than once for a Divine word?[12] If we look more closely also, we shall find real differences in the three occasions. Chapter 21 refers to the earlier part of the siege when a Divine intervention is looked for, similar to that in the time of Hezekiah when Isaiah promised that Sennacherib would not capture Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:1-7). Chapter 34:1-7 occurs later, but before the siege was interrupted by the advance of the Egyptians, whereas chapter 37:4-10 refers to that temporary lifting of the siege, and is thus the latest of the three passages. "Thus we have three separate deliverances from Jeremiah to the king, each with its own vivid phrases and distinctive edge."

The account in chapter 34:1-7, like that in chapter 21, is taken from the memoirs of Baruch. A word comes to Jeremiah from the Lord to Zedekiah. Apparently the first message had not convinced the king that resistance was hopeless. So he is told again that the city is to be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and be burned with fire; that he himself shall be taken by the Babylonian king and carried into captivity where he will not die by the sword, but in peace with the usual rites of burnings and lamentations. It is evident from this detail concerning the fate of Zedekiah, as well as from the indications given at the close of verse 7, that the siege had lasted longer, and reached a later stage than when the message was spoken recorded in chapter 21.

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[12] See George Adam Smith, pp. 267, 268.

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*Verse 1.* This verse is probably editorial. *Verse 2.* Jeremiah evidently delivers this message in person. The picture presented to the imagination is most dramatic. *Verses 3-5.* These verses raise a serious problem. This prediction of Jeremiah is out of all harmony with the event. Zedekiah did not die in peace, but witnessed the execution of his sons and then had his own eyes put out and suffered a miserable fate. That he should have been leniently treated by Nebuchadnezzar is hardly credible. The question arises how could Jeremiah have imagined that he would come to an honorable end, and how can we reconcile such a promise to Zedekiah with Jeremiah's invariable attitude, and with the strong impression he desired to make upon the king of the futility of any resistance to the Babylonians? Ezekiel condemned Zedekiah's course in the strongest terms (17:11-21), and could Jeremiah have done otherwise? The simplest way out of these difficulties is to reconstruct the text slightly so as to make this mitigation of the king's fate conditional on immediate and absolute surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. *Verse 5. Burnings.* The reference is not to cremation but to the burning of sweet spices at the funeral. A king's body was always buried (see 2 Chronicles 16:14, 21:19).

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3. Chapter 34:8-22. This section follows in direct chronological order the first part of the chapter. It

tells a story of despicable perfidy upon the part of the Jews. It seems that in the earlier part of the siege, Zedekiah had persuaded the people to liberate their Jewish slaves who had completed six years of service (verse 14). We are not told why this was done. The emancipation may have been due to motives of political expediency, since, during a siege, the slaves were of no particular use to their owners, who thus had "fewer useless mouths to feed." The impression given by the narrative, however, is that the liberation was an act of generosity, welcome to the slaves. Its motive may have been to please the Lord and thus win His help, in the hope that the siege would be raised, as it was in the days of Sennacherib. When, however, the siege was actually temporarily suspended, owing to the sudden advance of the Egyptians, the people at once broke their promise, violated their covenant and forced the liberated slaves back into service again. This act of treachery was also an act of blasphemy; for the people had made a solemn oath with God which they had now broken. To a human wrong there was added a flagrant sin. Together, these aroused the burning indignation of the prophet. No wonder if he felt that a people so base, so bereft of all sense of duty to God or man, deserved the fate which was in store for them.

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*Verse 8. "Unto them."* These words should be omitted. "Liberty" is proclaimed not to the people but to the slaves. *Verse 9.* It is a surprise to discover that the wealthy Jews had made slaves of their own countrymen. As a result of war and famine, many of the poorer peasants had been reduced to such straits that they had no alternative but to sell themselves and their children into slavery. The concentration of such wealth as there was in the hands of a few, created class distinctions and bred those ideas which commonly belong to the institution of slavery wherever it exists. *Verses 13-14.* It is not clear why reference should be made to the well-known Hebrew law (Exodus 21:2, Deuteronomy 15:12), that a slave who had served six years should be freed; for here we have to do with a pledge to emancipate all the slaves at once. It is probable, therefore, that the reference to the Hebrew law was a later and inept editorial insertion. The law is described according to the form in Deuteronomy. *Verse 17.* The eloquence of this reference will not escape the reader. The people have not kept their agreement to liberate the slaves. So the Lord will now emancipate the people from their obligation to Him, and they will be free to fall victims to the sword, to pestilence and to famine. *Tossed to and fro.* Better, will make them to be a consternation to the nations of the earth (see 15:4). *Verses 18-20.* There has probably been considerable editorial expansion in this passage. The ceremony of passing between pieces of calf, comes down to us from Genesis 15:10. It was a symbolic method of ratifying a solemn covenant, an essentially mystic rite, the two parties to the covenant being united, as it were, within the life of the same sacred victim. The reference to this rite here emphasizes the solemnity of the covenant which the people had broken. *Verse 21.* The incidental reference in this verse to the raising of the siege, gives the explanation, omitted earlier in the narrative, why the people had violated their vow. *Verse 22.* The Babylonians will return and take Jerusalem and destroy it.

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4. Chapter 37:1-10. The raising of the siege by the advance of the Egyptians is here made the occasion of another prophecy. Jeremiah (verse 4) was still in freedom, and Zedekiah, seeing that the Egyptians were on their way, wanted the intercessions of Jeremiah, just as Hezekiah had depended on Isaiah (Isaiah 37:2-5). So he had sent messengers imploring Jeremiah to pray to God for him and for the people. It is impossible for us to tell whether he was to pray that the siege might be lifted, or that it might be abandoned. At any rate, the siege was lifted, and then came this swift oracle from God to Jeremiah: "Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, Behold . . ." One calls up the picture of Jeremiah as he must have looked, uttering these terrible words. Without doubt, he had shared with the others in the privations of the siege. It must have taken its toll of his strength, and it is a gaunt and haggard figure that stands before us. But there is no weakening of his moral energy, no dying down of the flame of his spirit. Into that message he flings as it were the full strength of his moral conviction, and his words must have sounded shrill and have caused echoes of terror to awaken in the minds of his countrymen. So the awesome message comes to its piercing climax: "If you had defeated the whole army of the Babylonians, and only wounded men remained, they would rise up like spectres and coming like ghosts from their tents would set this city on fire and burn it to ashes" (verse 10).

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*Verse 1.* How strange it seems to have Zedekiah mentioned as if we had never heard of him before. The editor has in the preceding chapters been talking about Jehoiachin and makes an elaborate introduction to his change of subject. *Verse 3.* The members of the deputation are not the same as in chapter 21:2, where Pashhur and Zephaniah were the messengers. Jehucal is substituted for Pashhur. The fact that Jehucal in 38:1 urges Jeremiah's imprisonment is no warrant for believing that he may not have served as an emissary here. Indeed, this hearing of Jeremiah's message may have convinced Jehucal that Jeremiah was too dangerous a man to remain longer at large. *Verse 7.* The reason for the retreat of the Egyptians is not given to us. From Ezekiel, chapter 30:21, it appears that they may have suffered defeat by the Babylonians. Possibly they were convinced that they were outnumbered and withdrew as the Babylonians approached. *Verse 10.* *"Every man in his tent,"* i.e. there may have been but a single survivor in each tent. But even these few wounded men would be enough to defeat the Jews and to destroy Jerusalem.

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5. Chapter 37:11-21. It is clear that this kind of thing could not go on indefinitely. Here are the Jews enduring a siege, endeavoring desperately to throw off the enemy, while Jeremiah goes up and down the streets, telling king and people alike that their efforts are fruitless, and predicting the victory of the enemy and the destruction of Jerusalem. The wonder is that he was allowed to be at large so long. It is a tribute to his immense influence and to the veneration felt for him by Zedekiah and the people generally that he was not imprisoned or executed long before. It is no surprise, therefore, to discover that this last outburst of Jeremiah strained the patience of the people to the breaking point.

When the siege was temporarily lifted, and the armies of the Babylonians had departed, for a time, from the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem, Jeremiah left the city to go to Anatoth, his birthplace, to transact some business. This may have had to do with a real-estate transaction of which we shall hear later, or it may have been to secure needed funds. At any rate, as he was leaving the city by the northern gate, the officer on duty there arrested him on the charge that he was deserting to the Babylonians. The charge was a plausible one since desertions were frequent (38:19, 52:15), and Jeremiah had already declared that only deserters would survive the siege (21:9). Probably a good many of the people had not approved the revolt against Babylon and were ready to escape its consequences.

Jeremiah indignantly denied the charge. He may have given what some would call treasonable advice to others, but he knew that his place was in the city and with the people. And the insinuation that he was trying to save his own skin must have made him very angry. Jeremiah's attitude may be likened [13] to that of a captain of a sinking ship. He may urge both passengers and crew to abandon it—but his own place is on board until the ship sinks. Jeremiah knew that the ship of state was foundering, but he also knew that his place was with the people. Subsequent events proved how false this charge of desertion was to the character of Jeremiah.

Once arrested, the feeling against the prophet mounted swiftly. The leaders of the people were now inexperienced, hot-headed men. The older and wiser statesmen had all been carried away to Babylon. These "princes" were not only indignant against Jeremiah for predicting the victory of the enemy, but they were doubtless smarting under Jeremiah's denunciation of them for their treatment of the slaves. The time had come to silence him. So they took him and put him in an underground dungeon which they had constructed in the house of a high official. Here he was sure of especial safe-keeping. And here Jeremiah would have died (verse 20) if the "princes" had had their way.

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[13] See A. S. Peake, Vol. 1, p. 24.

How long Jeremiah remained in this loathsome confinement, we do not know. The text only says "many days." When he was removed, the siege seems to have been renewed, so that we may imagine a period of several weeks at least. When the Egyptians had retreated, however, and the Babylonians had again surrounded the city, Zedekiah, who strangely reminds us of Pilate, bethought himself of Jeremiah. He had always believed in the real inspiration of the prophet. And now, with the terror of the siege again upon him, he sent for Jeremiah secretly and asked him if he had any message from God.

The attitude of Jeremiah at this point is most interesting and deserves careful study. In the first place, he retracts nothing. He boldly tells the man in whose hands his own fate rests that he is to be delivered up to Nebuchadnezzar. Then, he asserts his innocence of any crime. What has he done, except to utter without fear or favor what he knows to be the Will of God? Has he not proved that he is a true prophet? What has become, he asks, of those "other" prophets who had declared that if Zedekiah would revolt he would achieve the independence of Jerusalem? Finally, he does not hesitate to plead for his own life. Jeremiah is here revealed as a man of normal common sense. He is not a fanatic. He does not court martyrdom. He is not anxious to die. He uses every avenue for escape that he can see. The only thing he will not do is to alter by a hair's breadth the message of what he believes with his whole soul to be the Will of God. So, he begs Zedekiah not to send him back to the dungeon, and the king so far relents as to order that he be transferred to the court of the guard and be given a loaf of bread daily. To this place, then, Jeremiah was conducted, and here he was destined to remain for some time.

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*37:13. Irijah.* This is the only mention of the man. The Hananiah of whom he was the grandson is not to be identified with Jeremiah's antagonist in chapter 28, who was probably a much younger man. *Verse 15.* Irijah was doubtless simply following instructions when he arrested Jeremiah. He had been ordered to detain any who left the city. *House of Jonathan.* Why this private house was used for a prison, we do not know. Possibly the regular prisons were full. *Verse 16. When.* A better reading is: "And Jeremiah came, and remained," with a full stop at the end of the sentence. *Verse 21.* The court of the guard was a part of the royal palace (see Nehemiah 3:25). It was intended for those whom it was desired to restrain and to keep under observation, without condemning them to be immured with the common prisoners. Thus it means not the court where the guard was stationed, but the court where the prisoners were guarded.

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6. Chapter 32:6-15, 24-26, 36-44. Jeremiah was one of those irrepressible personalities who are bound to be heard from under any conditions or circum-

stances. He reminds us at this, as well as at other points, of Paul. One cannot help thinking what friends and comrades these two men would have been. What Jeremiah was to the old dispensation, Paul was to the new. Both were men of indomitable spirit, yet tender and sensitive, who were never daunted, never cowed, met persecution with equanimity, exercised keen judgment and common sense, and took advantage of every possible opportunity to further their cause. How easily one can put into the mouth of Jeremiah Paul's classic word: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy."[14]

Jeremiah, then, is detained in the guarded court, and the siege is on again. But prison no more silences Jeremiah than it did Paul. These are effervescing personalities. The only way to silence them is to kill them. As long as they breathe, they continue to agitate. So, the scene of Jeremiah's activities is simply shifted from the streets of Jerusalem to the court of the guard.

It is evident from the verses 1-4, which are doubtless from the hand of the editor, that this section follows immediately the one which we have just discussed (37:11-21). The story is an interesting one, and it throws into the foreground once more an important element of Jeremiah's outlook which is a welcome relief from the dark prophecies of disaster which we have just traversed.

It seems that while Jeremiah was in the detention house, a relative of his came to him and asked him to purchase some real estate in Anatoth. This relative wanted to sell, and Jeremiah was the next of kin, and was thus the one to buy. Now, that Hanamel should

[14] Acts 20:24 (Authorized Version).

want to sell his field is not strange. Real estate in the environs of Jerusalem at this particular moment could not have been valued very high. The question is, why should Hanamel have imagined that Jeremiah should want to purchase it, and why, in view of Jeremiah's unpopularity in Anatoth, should he have come to Jeremiah at all? Is it possible to conjecture that this relative felt that he could "unload" his property upon Jeremiah in the same way in which modern preachers are supposed to be ready victims to all kinds of unsound investment schemes?

Jeremiah seems to have had some inkling that Hanamel was coming on some such errand. It is just possible that his own interrupted trip to Anatoth (37:12) may have been connected with Hanamel's desire to dispose of his property. At any rate, he was ready to receive Hanamel when he arrived, and if Jeremiah had been in any doubt what answer to give, that doubt vanished the moment that Hanamel stood before him. Without any hesitation, he agreed to purchase; without any demur, he paid the full price asked for the property, and he paid cash. He had the deed made out, signed, witnessed and sealed. And he took the deed and gave it to Baruch for safe-keeping, in the presence of the witnesses.

Why was Jeremiah so willing to buy apparently worthless real estate, and to pay without any bargaining the price that was asked for it? Because of the "word of the Lord" which had come to him. The purchase of this piece of property by the prophet was symbolic of the ultimate redemption of the whole land by the Lord. Just as Jeremiah had purchased this field to himself, the Lord would redeem the people from the hand of the enemy, and "houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land."

It is true that the enemy shall capture the city now (verse 24ff.) and lay waste the country. Yet the Lord has told me to buy this field. Nothing is too hard for the Lord to perform. And though the city be destroyed now (verses 36ff.) and the people perish and the remnant be taken into exile, yet He will bring them again into their own land, and cause them to dwell there in safety and He will give them an heart to fear and to serve Him forever. When that day comes, fields which to-day seem worthless shall be bought and sold. The investment which I am making in buying this field is a good one, for it is grounded on the promise and guarantee of the Lord to be the Savior of this land and people after these days of suffering and punishment are over.

Such is the glowing message of the prophet which lights up with its ray of hope the darkness which envelops Jerusalem. How swift the inspiration was which reached the heart of Jeremiah! Until the moment that Hanamel stood before him, he had no notion of what it was all about. Then, in one sudden flash of illumination he understood. Instantly his whole nature kindled. In a moment he had become the mouthpiece of the Mind and Will of God, and there poured out of his lips this eloquent message of that long-suffering Love which could not spare the people their present punishment, but would save them at the last.

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*Chapter 32,* like so many others in the book, is not a unity. There are portions of it which do not belong to Jeremiah. *Verses 1-5* giving the setting in which this incident took place is doubtless editorial. The suggestion in *verse 3* that Jeremiah's imprisonment in the guardhouse was due to Zedekiah's resentment does not gibe with 37:21, where we learned that it was an act of mercy upon the part of the king who thus saved him from the horrors of the dungeon. The latter part of *verse 5,* "until . . . prosper," is presumably a still later addition. The author of this addition may have confused Zedekiah with Jehoiachin (52:31-34) whose fortunes did thus change. The interrogation point which closes the verse should doubtless be changed to a period. *Verse 6.* The present text makes it appear that Jeremiah related this incident to Zedekiah in reply to the king's question (verse 3). This is obviously impossible, since what follows has nothing to do with the reasons which prompted Jeremiah to prophesy the national disaster. The best way out of the difficulty is to omit the words "Jeremiah said." *Verse 7,* on the "right of redemption," see Leviticus 25:25ff., Ruth 3:9-13, 4:1-12. The regulations were made to make sure that property was kept in the family. At this time, evidently (in contrast with Leviticus 25:34), individual priests could own and sell property at will. *Verse 9.* Seventeen shekels, about $12.00 in our currency. The amount may seem small, but real estate at this time, it is easy to see, had depreciated in value; cf. 2 Samuel 24:24, Zechariah 11:12-13, St. Matthew 27:3-10. *Verses 10-11.* It is an interesting fact that deeds have been discovered in Babylon of the same type as here described. See Peake, in loco, Vol. II, p. 117, for a full account of these methods of making out deeds. *Verse 14.* Compare with this the redundant style of modern legal phraseology. *Verses 16-23.* This prayer of Jeremiah is a later insertion. It closely resembles the prayer in Nehemiah 9:5-58, and its verses are made up of familiar quotations from Deuteronomy and words of Jeremiah found elsewhere in this book. The long introduction is out of all proportion to the prayer itself, and its general content has no particular application to the present situation. *Verses 24-25.* These verses doubtless belong to Jeremiah. They join on perfectly with verse 16. The prophet, for the moment, cannot reconcile the word of the Lord to buy the field, with the impending capture of the city by the Babylonians. It is another expostulation of the kind with which we have become familiar. Since it seems unlikely that this prayer should have been uttered for rhetorical effect, we must suppose that Jeremiah passed through these stages of experience: (1) The impulse to buy the field without understanding why; (2) the prayer which asks God for the reason; (3) the illumination which follows as an answer to his prayer. *Verse 24. The mounts* (cf. 6:6, 33:4, 2 Samuel 20:15, 2 Kings 19:32, Isaiah 37:33, Ezekiel 4:2, 17:17, 26:8), were earthern embankments from which the storming parties made their assaults. *Is given.* Jeremiah is certain that the city will be captured. *Verses 26-44.* Of this section, verses 28-35 may without question be regarded as a later addition. This lengthy description of the sins of the people is certainly irrelevant to the situation. The reader therefore will pass directly from verse 26 to verse 36. Here we have the answer of the Lord to Jeremiah's prayer. *Verse 39.* Cf. Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26, Deuteronomy 4:10, 6:24. *Verse 40.* Cf. Isaiah 55:3, Ezekiel 16:60, 37:26. With both verses, one will compare the words of "the New Covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31-34). *Verse 41;* cf. Deuteronomy 28:63, Isaiah 62:5, 65:19, Zephaniah 3:17.

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If the reader will pause here for a moment and turn back to chapter 30, he will find that these four chapters, 30-33, have a single theme: The Glorious Future and Ultimate Redemption of Israel and Judah. It was for this reason that the editor of the book brought them together, and set them down here in the middle of the book. Taken together, they have been called "The Book of Hope."[15] These chapters have been hotly disputed by the critics. It is admitted that a large portion of these chapters does not come from the hand of Jeremiah at all. The consensus of opinion is that their compilation is late and that much of this material dates from the end of the Exile. Yet, interspersed through these chapters it is agreed that there are some genuine prophecies of Jeremiah himself.

It has been a delicate task for the scholar to pick his way through these chapters, rejecting all those portions which show that they came out of the period of the Exile and reveal their close affinity with Second Isaiah, and retaining, as belonging to Jeremiah, only those sections or fragments which seem to reveal the style and mood of the prophet and reflect the conditions under which he must have written.

In general, it is agreed that nearly the whole of chapter 30 must be assigned to an unknown author who wrote during the period of the Exile. Verses 5-7 may possibly be by Jeremiah, and in verses 12-15 we may have a lament of the prophet after the destruction of Jerusalem. The rest of chapter 30, however, is akin in style to Second Isaiah, and evidently presupposes a speedy return to Palestine. It seems clear that it could not have come from the pen of Jeremiah.

With chapter 31, however, the case is different. Verses 31-34 contain the New Covenant. Chapter

[15] George Adam Smith, ibid., p. 293. See chapter XVII, p. 326.

31:1-6, 15-22 are by Jeremiah, and possibly verses 23-28. These passages may well have been composed after the destruction of Jerusalem while Jeremiah was at Ramah, whither he had been carried together with the rest of the people by the victorious Babylonians.[16]

Besides 30:12-15, and 32, the first nine verses of chapter 33 may belong to these closing days in the reign of Zedekiah. The rest of chapter 33, however, belongs to the unknown writer during the Exile. It closely resembles the latter part of Isaiah; it presupposes the destruction of Jerusalem, the Exile, and subsequent conditions with which Jeremiah could not have been familiar. And it expresses hopes of a speedy return to Jerusalem, whereas Jeremiah believed the captivity was to last for many years. The reader who is interested in the question of the authorship of these passages will find a full discussion in Peake, Vol. II, pp. 68-70, 127-128.

7. Chapter 33:1-9. This is a short prophecy of the ultimate restoration of Judah, uttered while Jeremiah was still in the guardhouse. The situation remains the same as in the preceding chapter so far as Jeremiah's fortunes are concerned. The siege, however, seems to have advanced to a still more critical stage, since houses are now being torn down to furnish materials for defense. At such a moment Jeremiah utters another of his Hymns of Hope.[17] The terrible progress of the siege forces from the heart of Jeremiah one of those passionate outbursts

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[16] See chapter XVII, pp. 326-333.

[17] There is every reason for believing that this closes with verse 9. For with the beginning of verse 10, the situation is entirely changed. The city has now fallen and the land has been laid waste, and from this point through the chapter the viewpoint is all from the later days of the Exile.

of love for the people which, as we have seen all through the book, underlay his condemnation of their sins and his prediction of their punishment. Now that the catastrophe is imminent and is about to break in all its force and fury, the word of the Lord comes to him once more with its message of final forgiveness and restoration. The city may be destroyed and its streets may be filled with the bodies of the dead, but the Lord will yet bring it health and will reveal unto it peace and truth. The iniquities of the people will be cleansed, and the city shall be a cause of wonder because of its exaltation and its glory.

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*Verses 2, 3.* Because of the resemblance of these verses to Second Isaiah (45:18, 48:6$^{b}$), they may be an insertion by a later hand. *Verses 4-5.* The text is corrupt and the present reading is impossible. The houses could not come to fight against the enemy. The probable sense is: The houses are broken down for a defense. The Chaldeans have come to fight and to fill the broken-down houses with the dead bodies of men. *Verse 6.* Health = fresh flesh. *Verse 7.* The reigns of David and Solomon are in the writer's mind. *Verse 8.* Cf. Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 4:4, and especially Ezekiel 36:25. *Verses 10-26.* This entire passage presupposes the exile and must be assigned to a later date.

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These passages from the Book of Hope, and the others which are still to be considered, are all eloquent witness to Jeremiah's ultimate confidence in the redemptive love of God. He never closed his eyes to the realities of the moral predicament in which

Israel was involved. He never equivocated or temporized. He never said "peace when there is no peace." The just judgments of God were uttered in their depth and fullness. Yet one who reads no further into Jeremiah's heart fails to understand it. The Book of Hope points to this beyond. Nothing ultimately can defeat the love of God. He will in the end break down every moral barrier and bring to pass the redemption of His children. It is the combination in their completion of these two elements of justice and mercy which make up the true moral prophet. Jeremiah was lacking in neither. In him was "optimism without frivolity, and seriousness without despair."

8. Chapter 38, 39:15-18. In the guardhouse,[18] Jeremiah had enjoyed not only a certain measure of freedom of action, but also a certain measure of freedom of speech. No one can read his addresses spoken at this time without perceiving that he recanted and retracted nothing. He had from the first insisted that the Chaldeans would capture and destroy the city. And he kept on saying this during his confinement in the guardhouse. True, he also predicted the ultimate restoration of Jerusalem. But what interested the people especially at this time was the immediate deliverance of the city from the terribleness of the siege. As this went on, as privation deepened, as sickness and famine weakened the people, the attitude of Jeremiah must

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[18] Skinner believes this account of Jeremiah's imprisonment to be a duplicate of that in chapter 37. Those interested in the discussion may refer to Skinner, op. cit., pp. 256-260. Most Bible students agree, however, with George Adam Smith (op. cit., pp. 284-5) that the similarities between the two narratives are natural, and that their differences are unmistakable. That Jeremiah should twice have undergone such treatment seems most likely, and both incidents fit well into the chronological arrangement of the events as we have outlined them.

have become more and more intolerable. Here was a people desperately engaged in a life-and-death struggle. How long were they to tolerate this implacable man, who could not be silenced, whose seditious words weakened the morale and lessened the resisting powers of the people? Thus what happened to Jeremiah was bound to happen. We all feel that. It had happened before, and, but for the superstitious reverence of King Zedekiah for Jeremiah, the prophet would have been left to perish in his dungeon. The king had liberated him and given him a measure of freedom, and here he was abusing that freedom and continuing to utter the most treasonable words imaginable. All the while the people's fortunes were becoming more and more desperate. Finally, the leaders could stand it no longer. The only wonder is that they had stood it so long. They begged the king to put him to death, to silence him once for all, "forasmuch as he weakeneth the hands of the men of war, . . . and the hands of all the people" (38:4). And Zedekiah, using words that remind us forcibly of similar language used by Pilate under much the same circumstances said, "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you" (verse 5).

The leaders evidently shrank from killing Jeremiah outright. So they formed a plan which would accomplish indirectly the same result. In the guardhouse was an unused cistern at the bottom of which was a deep, miry sediment. Into this cistern Jeremiah was lowered by cords, until he sank into the mire at the bottom and was left to die. It is clear from what follows that this was done without the knowledge of the king.

An interesting characteristic of Bible narratives is the important rôle played by obscure and insignificant individuals. It was a captive Jewish maid who was the cause of the cure and conversion of Naaman the mighty Syrian warrior (2 Kings 5:3). Paul owed his life to an unknown and unnamed captain of the guard, whose instant action saved the apostle from the hands of an angry mob (Acts 21:31, 32). And here we find an Ethiopian emerging from obscurity to immortality as the savior of Jeremiah. We know nothing whatever of Ebed-melech except what we read here. He evidently witnessed the lowering of Jeremiah into the pit, and understood that if the prophet's life were to be saved, no time must be lost. So he posted off at once to the king and, breathless, told him what he had seen. Once more the vacillating king changes front. If he cannot resist the "princes," neither can he let Jeremiah perish in such a hole. So he commanded the Ethiopian to take a guard with him, and to rescue Jeremiah. The care with which this was done is particularized in the text. To prevent the ropes from cutting into Jeremiah's flesh under his arms, rags were let down to him by the ropes so that he would not have to grope for them in the mud. Thus Jeremiah was drawn up once more to the light of day and to the freedom of the guardhouse. Where the "princes" were while this was going on, we do not know. It is evident that they did not dare to interfere.

Once free, Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and asked the prophet what he had to reveal as the Will of God. We picture Jeremiah as he must have looked after his terrible experience. For a moment he pauses, he parries. What good to tell the king the Will of God? The king will kill him for telling it, and he will not obey what he has been told. Then Zedekiah gives a royal pledge—how many of these history records, pledges solemnly given and often broken—that he will not put Jeremiah to death himself, or permit the leaders to kill him. "Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord." It was the same word, spoken over and over again. If Zedekiah would surrender, his life would be saved, and the city would be spared from destruction. If not, the city would be burned, and Zedekiah would not escape. "Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord . . . so it shall be well with thee" (verse 20). Zedekiah, in terror over this solemn repetition of impending doom, implores Jeremiah not to tell the "princes" what he has said, otherwise the king will be powerless to prevent the leaders from killing him. So, if he is asked what passed between him and the king, he is to say that he had begged the king not to send him back to the prison in Jonathan's house. Now, although this is not mentioned in the narrative, it is probably true that Jeremiah had asked just that of the king. Zedekiah, therefore, begs Jeremiah to tell a part of the truth, but not the whole of it.

It fell out just as the king had anticipated. As soon as the interview was over, the leaders crowded around him and asked what had gone on. Jeremiah obeyed the king and said what he had been told to say and no more. Did he do right, or did he do wrong? To have told the whole truth might have meant instant death for himself, and he would have betrayed the confidence of the king. Jeremiah was not keen to die. He had a healthy desire to live. Neither did he wish to be disloyal to the man who had just saved his life. Most Bible readers will feel that if he did wrong, it was a wrong for which it is easy to forgive him. Even to-day people disagree on this point of ethics. That he acted as he did from personal fear, or because he was weakened by hunger or suffering is not to be believed. That loyalty to Zedekiah was a strong motive is much more likely. At any rate, Jeremiah did what the king told him to do, and "abode in the court of the guard, until the day that Jerusalem was taken" (verse 28).

In chapter 39:15-18, there is preserved for us a short fragment of a prophecy which must belong to this last period before the capture of Jerusalem. It is a word of promise to the Ethiopian who had rescued Jeremiah. Just as Rahab the harlot was remembered for good, so Ebed-melech is not to be forgotten. The city shall be destroyed. But he is to be delivered, "because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord."

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*38:1.* Of the first two of these princes, we know nothing further. The Gedaliah here mentioned is of course to be distinguished from the governor of chapters 40, 41. Jucal is the same as Jehucal, 37:3, and Pashhur is to be identified with the man of the same name in 21:1 (but not with the Pashhur of 20:1). *Unto all the people,* i.e. all who came inside the guard-house, the soldiers and visitors. *Verse 2.* Some scholars hold that at this stage of the siege Jeremiah would not have counseled desertion, and insist that this verse is an insertion from 21:9. *Verse 9. "And he is like . . . in the city."* This is a difficult passage. If there is no more food to be had in the city, Jeremiah will die of the famine if he is rescued from the pit as surely as if he is left there. This is probably an exaggerated statement of actual conditions. Bread has become so scarce that in the pit Jeremiah will lack even the scanty rations he had received in the dungeon (37:21), which had barely sufficed to keep him alive. *Verse 10. Thirty men.* The text is faulty. The number of men is out of proportion to the errand. We should probably read three men. *Verse 14. The third entry.* We do not know exactly where or what this was. Clearly it was a convenient and private entrance for the king. *Verse 19.* The king's fear that he would be handled roughly by the Jews who had deserted to the Babylonians was not an imaginary one. They would naturally hold him responsible for the disaster. *Verse 22. The women who are left,* i.e. from the previous deportation. The metaphor "*thy feet are sunk in the mire*" is suggested by the experience through which Jeremiah has passed. The vision seems to have flashed upon the prophet as he was speaking. *Chapter 39:17. The men . . . afraid* probably the princes are meant whose vengeance, because of his interference with their plans, the Ethiopian might well dread.

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9. Chapter 39:1-14. The final capture of Jerusalem is narrated in chapter 39. Unlike the preceding chapters in which we have a straight, uninterrupted story from the memoirs of Baruch, chapter 39 contains a good deal of material which belongs to a later hand, and is concerned with the fate of the city and of the king rather than with the fortunes of Jeremiah. Much of this material is found also in chapter 52, which in its turn is largely a reproduction of 2 Kings 24:18-25:21. The reading of all of these passages will give the full account, as found in the Old Testament, of the end of this terrible siege. The fate of Jeremiah is described to us in the brief portions of this chapter which belong to the memoirs of Baruch. This account will include verses 1$^a$, 3, 14. All that we are told is that with the capture of the city, the

Babylonian princes came and sat in the middle gate to administer affairs and then sent to release Jeremiah. The Babylonians had probably heard through deserters of the rôle which Jeremiah had played during the siege, and they were inclined to treat him with respect and to make sure that his life was spared, and that he did not fall a victim either to the Babylonian soldiery or to his own enraged countrymen. So they committed him for safe-keeping to Gedaliah whose father Ahikam had protected the prophet early in Jehoiakim's reign (chapter 26:24). So Jeremiah, no longer a prisoner, moved in and out among the people. There was to be one more chapter in the career of this extraordinary man. His labors and his sorrows were not yet over. He had not yet drunk to the dregs his cup of humiliation. Death would have been an easy end compared to the lot which still awaited him.

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*39:verses 1*$^{b}$*-2.* These verses are an evident insertion, and go over history with which we are already familiar. We should therefore read: "And it came to pass when Jerusalem was taken (1$^{a}$) that all the princes, etc. (verse 3). *Verse 3.* Of these four names, the first and the fourth are identical. It looks as if Baruch were having a hard time with the names of these heathen princes; cf. verse 13. *Verses 4-10.* An extract from chapter 52:4-16. *Verses 11-13* are probably from a later hand. It is not impossible that Nebuchadnezzar himself may have heard of Jeremiah and may have interested himself in him. *Verse 14* connects directly with verse 3. *Carry him home.* Probably to his own home.

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10. Chapter 15:5-12. The date of this short prophecy is doubtful. Although the verbs are in the past tense, it is possible [19] that Jeremiah is describing not what has happened, but what is to happen. It seems more likely, however, that we have here a meditation from the heart of Jeremiah as he surveys the final destruction of the city for which he had labored and prayed and suffered. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . behold your house is left unto you desolate." [20] No man now turns aside to pity her in her widowhood and misery. She has exhausted the patience of God by her obstinate rebellion against His Will. Now her desolation is complete. Verses 11 and 12 are obscure and are so hard to fit into the sense, that they may be a gloss. The meaning of verse 12 seems to be that the foe from the North is invincible.

> Since thou hast rejected Me, saith Yahwe,
>   And wentest backward,
> With uplifted hand I crushed thee:
>   I was tired of relenting.
> So I winnowed them out with the shovel
>   In the gates of the land;
> Have bereaved and destroyed My people
>   Who turned not from their ways.[21]

*Civitas Delenda*

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*Verse 7.* In Isaiah 30:24 both winnowing shovel and fan are mentioned. Cf. St. Matthew 3:12. *Verse 8.* The young warriors have fallen on the battle field and now their mother who comes looking for their bodies is also overtaken by the marauders. *Verse 9.* To be a mother of seven was considered to be a supreme example of blessedness. "To give up the ghost" means to faint, not to die.

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[19] This is the opinion of Peake. See op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 207.

[20] St. Matthew 23:37, 38.

[21] Trans. Skinner, op. cit., p. 271.

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11. Chapter 30:12-15. These verses occur in a chapter nearly the whole of which is plainly by the hand of a later editor. This section, however, has the style, the rhythm, the feeling of Jeremiah, and it is accepted by many scholars as authentic. It accurately reproduces what must have been the mood of the prophet as he surveyed the desolation of the city, and the ruin of the people whom he had loved.

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*30:13.* The transition from the medical to the legal metaphor is so abrupt that the first clause, *"I will plead thy cause"* may well be omitted as a gloss. If it is retained, the rendering should probably be, "There is none to plead thy cause; there are no medicines for thy sore; there no plaisters for thee" (see Revised Version margin). *Verse 14. Lovers:* i.e. the old heathen allies. The phrase, *"because thy sins were increased,"* should be struck out. It occurs also in verse 15 where it better fits the sense. *Verse 15.* The meaning of the verse is not that it is useless for Zion to lament because her pain is incurable, but rather that Zion has no cause for complaining that her pain is incurable, since the fault is all her own, and her punishment is her just desert.

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# CHAPTER XVI

## THE PATRIOTISM OF JEREMIAH

No one can read the record of the attitude of Jeremiah during the days of the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, without admitting that the political leaders would have been fully justified in putting him to death, according to all standards of political action in time of war. Those standards exist to-day. Is there any doubt what the fate would have been of one who during the World War had adopted the defeatist attitude of Jeremiah at a time of greatest strain and tension? What would have happened to a French publicist if, during the terrible days of August, 1914, he had gone about the streets of Paris, openly predicting the capture of the city by the Germans, and advising the soldiery to desert to the enemy? Can this attitude of Jeremiah be explained or defended or justified? Was he in any sense a true patriot, or was he guilty of grossest treason and a most despicable desertion of his countrymen at a time of terrible crisis?

These questions are not merely academic questions. They raise issues which men are debating to-day, which still disturb and perplex men's minds. Is loyalty to one's country the major loyalty of one's life? Is disloyalty to one's country ever to be condoned? Is it possible that conscience and a sense of duty will cause a man to favor the enemy? Must one say that a true citizen will endeavor to influence the state in a certain direction until hostilities are declared, but that then he has no other course open to him than to stand by his country? Is the Church the handmaid of the state, or has the Church the right to condemn national policies which she feels to be wrong even after war has been declared? Do patriotism and Christian principle ever come into conflict? If so, what is a Christian to do? Here we raise questions which, it is safe to say, multitudes of earnest, conscientious people do not know how to answer. But these are just the questions which are pushed to the front by the extraordinary attitude of Jeremiah during this last fateful period in his own life and in the life of his people.

From the very beginning of his ministry, as we have seen, Jeremiah looked to the North for the coming of a foe which should be the scourge of God for the sins of the people. The swift invasion of the Scythians was the first political event which roused his prophetic spirit and he did not hesitate then to predict that the Scythians would overrun the land and leave it desolate as a just punishment of the people. When, however, this invasion subsided as rapidly as it had advanced, and Judea was left untouched by the enemy, it was clear that Jeremiah's predictions were not to be fulfilled. For Jeremiah, this may have been a period of disillusion and depression. He may also have lost caste and standing as a prophet. His reputation was somewhat under a cloud.

This situation, however, did not last long. Events in the North were taking place which attracted and fastened the gaze of the prophet. The fall of Nineveh at the hands of the Babylonians meant the emergence of a new world power in the North. From this time on, for a period of over twenty years, Jeremiah never wavered in his conviction that the Babylonians were the chosen instrument of God for the punishment of His disobedient people. Nothing could stay their course. No power on earth could defeat this purpose. It was the decreed, foreordained, inevitable, inexorable Will of God. All political action was judged by the prophet from this point of view. From it he never departed. And from the time of the battle of Carchemish, Jeremiah knew that it was only a question of time, of a few years at most, when this purpose should be fulfilled. What made Jeremiah so sure? We must not omit the human element in our answer. All of the prophets of both Israel and Judah had proved themselves to be politically sagacious men. Jeremiah was no exception. He read aright the signs of the times. He knew that Egypt was politically rotten, that no dependence could be placed on her word or on her military resources. He was familiar with the jealousies and cabals of the little nations surrounding Judæa, which made any permanent or solid coalition between them impossible. He had intimate knowledge of the moral corruption of the people of Judæa, and of the political ineptitude of their leaders. And he had formed a just opinion of the strength and military ability of the Babylonians. Under these conditions, one might say that it would not require a prophet to predict the inevitable outcome of any trial of strength between Egypt and Palestine on the one hand, the Chaldeans on the other. But history has proved over and over again that nationalism can blind men's eyes more effectually than any other emotion known to man. It did this so effectually in Jeremiah's day that, as we have seen, he was the only prophet who foresaw and dared to foretell the doom that awaited city and people.

In addition, however, to keen political foresight, Jeremiah possessed profound moral convictions born of his insight into the mind and heart of God. No one can begin to understand, much less to do justice to, the political attitude of Jeremiah, who does not render account of these deep moral and spiritual motives which pass away beyond the sphere of secular politics, and move in the deep realm of moral and spiritual destiny. In a word, Jeremiah's mind is occupied with the working out of the moral plans of God. Therein lies the difference, immense, immeasurable, between the working of his mind, and the mind of his contemporaries. They are all concerned with practical politics, with immediate policies. What is the next best move to make? How can Nebuchadnezzar be checkmated? May reliance be placed upon Egypt? But the mind of the prophet is moving in another sphere altogether. He is concerned with the Word and Will of God. These are higher, more imperious than the needs or fortunes of the state. The preservation of the state is not the supreme objective, but rather the accomplishment of the regnant moral Will of God. God's ultimate purpose is to see that justice, righteousness, truth, honor are vindicated and preserved. Higher than the fortunes of a people are these ultimate moral ideals. If their vindication demands the destruction of the Jewish state, the Jewish state shall be destroyed. No people shall be saved because of past privilege, tradition, history, but only by its obedience to the Will of God. All of Jeremiah's contemporaries, in a word, formed their political judgments from the viewpoint of political expediency for the immediate welfare and preservation of the state. Jeremiah's political course, on the other hand, was guided by his inward and spiritual knowledge of the Will of God.

It will be seen from all of this how far Jeremiah had left behind the old popular notions that Jehovah was the natural and national champion of His people, and that He could be depended upon to defend them against all comers. Also he had long ago left behind him the idea that the Reform instituted by the code of Deuteronomy had really accomplished any permanent results. No such sweeping, surface reform as this, which centralized the worship at Jerusalem, but left the heart of the people as corrupt as before, could in anywise change the moral situation. Neither could Jeremiah fall back upon the idea which had inspired and animated Isaiah, that there was a spirit of goodness in the inner shrine of the heart of the people, an inviolable principle of goodness, on the strength of which he could base his passionate conviction that Jerusalem itself was inviolable since it enshrined this final and impregnable morality. Jeremiah saw no such inward principle of goodness in the people. All that he saw was the utter opposite of this. In king and noble, priest, prophet and people, he saw only dishonor, treachery, infidelity, irreligion and immorality. He saw no moral dike or barrier to the swift on-moving justice of God, any more than he saw any political obstacle that could prevent the on-march of the Babylonian hosts. In addition to all this, Jeremiah had learned that religion is not to be identified with temple or altar, with visible city or secular state. These might all be destroyed, but religion, which for Jeremiah had come to mean personal fellowship with God, would remain undestroyed and indestructible. Indeed, might not the destruction of City and temple prove the salvation of a truly spiritual religion? As a matter of fact, that is what did happen. For Jeremiah therefore, whose interests are ultimately religious interests, what might seem to others as irretrievable catastrophe would be only a blessing in disguise. Only in this way, perhaps, could the people be taught that religion is independent of national institutions and legal forms and ritual worship.

> We see enough to explain how [Jeremiah] could not only contemplate calmly the disappearance of the Jewish State, with all its venerable institutions, but even help forward its dissolution as the only way to liberate religion from its entanglement in the forms of a merely national worship. . . .[1]

Under these conditions, what was Jeremiah to do? No man ever loved his nation or his people more than Jeremiah loved his. The whole tragedy of his life is summed up in his passionate devotion to his people on the one hand, and his clear, unerring perception of the moral Will and Purpose of God on the other hand. Even so his position would have been tolerable if he could have kept quiet. But he could not keep quiet. He had tried to keep quiet and he had failed. There was this immense, irresistible pressure from within which made him speak in spite of himself. There is spread all over the book of Jeremiah the inward protest against being compelled to speak as he does. All that one can do is to pity the man. All that one can do is to honor the man. It is certain that one cannot blame the man. Only he who has no faith in any God, for whom the politics of the moment and not the eternal principles of righteousness or justice are the ultimate reality, only he can condemn the man who dared to assert that the moral Will of God is higher than the immediate interests of the secular state which had flouted that Will at every turn. If we ask, at this point, therefore, the question, "Was Jeremiah a true patriot?" the answer will depend on our definition of patriotism. If by a patriot is meant one who places the immediate national interest above every other interest, Jeremiah was not a true patriot. If by a patriot, however, one means a man who loves his country so much that nothing will satisfy him short of having his country become the custodian of high moral ideals; who judges his country according to its fidelity to these ideals, then Jeremiah's patriotism "makes men's common patriotism seem a trivial and tawdry thing." [2]

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[1] Skinner, op. cit., p. 269.

The situation, however, is sharpened for us by the siege of Jerusalem which over a period of two years caused the most terrible suffering, and evoked the utmost of courage from the hearts of the devoted defenders of their land. During this period Jeremiah openly taught that resistance was hopeless, and urged the government to surrender. He went farther than this. He advised both soldiers and civilians to break their allegiance and to desert to the enemy. This conduct, to the modern reader certainly seems detestable and repugnant. Yet the language of 21:9 and 38:2 admits of no other interpretation. In what way can this conduct be excused or justified?

Some scholars have sought a way out of this difficulty by declaring that the text of the book of Jeremiah must be corrupt; that there has been carried over into this period words of Jeremiah which belong to an earlier date. Others have not hesitated to declare that by now Jeremiah had lost his mind. Passion, suffering, mental tension, overwrought nerves, deprivation had done their worst for him and by now he was mentally irresponsible. Still others have not scrupled to surmise that he had been suborned by the Babylonians who had persuaded him to be their agent and to carry on an insidious propaganda, the object of which was to weaken the morale of the Jewish people.[8]

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[2] A. S. Peake, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 28.

These methods of meeting an undoubted difficulty will not bear careful examination. There is nothing to show that the text is corrupt. The subsequent career and activity of Jeremiah prove that his mental powers were unimpaired. And we may dismiss as fantastic a theory which degrades Jeremiah to the rôle of a political agent in the service of oriental diplomacy.

How, then, is Jeremiah's course to be explained? The answer must be found in the twofold motive which had guided and shaped his political course from the beginning of his ministry. In the first place, there is the human element, the political sagacity, the more comprehensive knowledge, the larger outlook on international affairs. Jeremiah had been convinced from the first that the revolt against Babylonia was doomed to failure, and he had done his best to prevent it. The siege of Jerusalem was the inevitable climax to the ill-starred policy of the pseudo-patriots who had urged the king to this fatal step. The only way in which the city could possibly be saved from destruction and the life of the king could be spared, was by surrender. There is no question that Jeremiah was right about this. There is also no question that many in Jerusalem agreed with him about this. The event proved that he was right. Political wisdom, in a word, dictated the very course which Jeremiah advocated. It may have seemed traitorous; none the less it was true.

In addition, however, to the human element in the attitude of Jeremiah, there was always the overwhelming conviction born of his prophetic insight, that the destruction of the city and the overthrow of the Jewish state were foreordained as a just punishment for the sins of rulers and people who had proved themselves to be faithless to a long-suffering and loving God. This conviction he was bound to utter. He could not withhold or restrain it. And utter it he did.

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[8] Hugo Winckler, as quoted in Skinner, op. cit., p. 264.

It is useless to endeavor to reconcile these two contradictory impulses as they met and coöperated in the heart of the prophet. Why should he counsel Zedekiah to surrender and so save himself and the city, if he felt that the destruction of the city and death of the king were foreordained and thus inevitable? We have met this paradox before in studying the inner life of the prophet. It is one of those contradictions in the spiritual life for which there is no solution. As a man, a friend of Zedekiah, a lover of the people, he urges a course which alone can spell their salvation. As a prophet, the mouthpiece of the Will of God, he declares and reveals that Will to a recreant people. He is not less a man because he is a prophet. He is not less a prophet because he is a man.

This whole attitude of Jeremiah, however, raises the larger question of the relation of the citizen to the state. Is it the duty of the citizen when the state is at war or in peril, to subordinate his private convictions to the national necessity? Should criticism cease when the die has been cast and the national defense calls for the loyalty and support of the people? So it still appears to many minds. The right to protest ceases when war has once been declared. One may seek to influence the course of national action down to a certain point. At that point, private judgment ends, and one who withdraws his allegiance and refuses the state his support, becomes guilty of treason. Thus the question still projects itself whether it is the duty of the individual to subordinate his conscientious convictions to the demand of the state for unanimity in the face of a common public danger.

The answer of all prophecy to this question is an uncompromising negative. The Hebrew prophets, as we have seen, were not concerned primarily with the preservation of the state. They were concerned primarily with the preservation of righteousness. If the state were an obstacle to the attainment of righteousness, then let the state be destroyed that righteousness might endure. Without doubt, from the standpoint of purely secular politics, this is sedition. If one takes the point of view that the preservation of the state is the supreme duty of every citizen, such an attitude cannot be defended. But the Hebrew prophets did not take a purely secular view of politics, neither did they believe that the object to be attained above all others was the preservation of the secular state.

If such was the attitude of prophecy, must not this also be the attitude of all personal religion and of the Christian Church? The primary loyalty of the Christian cannot be to the secular state. Always it must be to the Kingdom of Heaven. It is because this fact has been forgotten, ignored or neglected that the Church has not made its voice felt in shaping the policies of our modern world. Nearly eight hundred years ago a great monarch held undivided sway over a large part of the civilized world. But before the Emperor Frederick could receive his crown, he must prostrate himself on the ground before the Pope, hold the stirrups while the Pope mounted his horse, kiss his boots, lead the horse a short distance as a groom might do: all of this as a symbol and pledge of his menial obligation to the spiritual lord of the earth.

But our modern world has witnessed the exact opposite of this. During the past five hundred years there has been a gradual but powerful growth of nationalism. The state has assumed the ascendancy and the Church has been reduced to a position of comparative impotence. Not only has the state expected the Church to obey orders, but the Church itself has not conceived its rôle to be anything else. Down to modern times the Church has not imagined that it had any other duty than to be the handmaid of the state. Occasionally as in the prophetic soul of a Savonarola or of a John Knox, the voice of God defied the secular policies of the state: but one cannot say that this has been the voice of the Church. And one can read the whole wretched story of the political deviltry, chicanery, deceit which makes up the political history of modern Europe from the days of Frederick the Great to the day of Disraeli, without finding a single instance in which the Church ever challenged one of these miserable policies which outraged the laws of Christ and the ideals of human brotherhood.

It is not too much to say that it is precisely the higher patriotism of Jeremiah which the Church of our day is seeking to attain. It has been asking itself serious questions concerning the relation of Church and state. Is the state to continue to control the Church, or is the Church to maintain its independence of the state, and to utter its own free, God-given message in faithful accord with a spiritual society, to which it has given its allegiance, high above the kingdoms and principalities of this world?[4] When crises arise, shall the Church accommodate the principles which it has espoused to the exigencies of practical politics, or shall the Church refuse to abandon its ideal, and emphasize any and every divergence between them? Shall the Church, in a word, abdicate its religious office, as it must, to echo the policies of governments, or shall it bring the message of religion to bear upon Halls of Parliament and Houses of Congress? And if the state continue policies which flout the message which the Church is commissioned to deliver, can the state continue to expect the support of the Church?

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[4] See the author's *The Christian Church in the Modern World*, pp. 137-139, 153-160.

If this must be the ultimate relation of the Church to the state, must not this also be the ultimate attitude of every religious man? He cannot, that is, be expected to throw his religious convictions to one side at the behest of a secular state which has not been willing to listen to, or to follow the plain teaching of the religion in which that man believes. No citizen will lightly withhold his allegiance. The issue must be deep, vital, all-controlling, as it was in the case of Jeremiah. But that such an issue may arise, in which religious principle and secular politics come face to face is not impossible. In this case, to refuse allegiance to the state will not mean that one loves one's country less, but, as with Jeremiah, that one loves it more. In the light of history, how many men who were branded as traitors to their country, are seen, in the perspective of time, to have been the real patriots? George Adam Smith [5] cites the case of John Knox who

> told the garrison and citizens of St. Andrews, when besieged by the French, that "their corrupt life could not escape the punishment of God." . . . When they vaunted "England will rescue us," he said, "Ye shall not see them, but ye shall be delivered into your enemies' hands and shall

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[5] *Jeremiah*, pp. 272-3.

> be carried into a strange country." All of which came to pass. . . .

Did John Knox love his Scotland more or less than the so-called patriots of his day? Always in the perspective of time it will be found that the true patriot is he who puts righteousness first and dares to oppose all secular policies which flout the principles of that Kingdom of God to which one has given his first allegiance.

This attitude, the Church and Christian men are now taking. They are learning that higher patriotism of which Jeremiah is a supreme example. This is the most significant fact alike in the political and religious history of our modern world. Untold possibilities lie within it. The Church has been shaken out of its lethargy. It is wide awake and it is confronting the state with a conscience which the state will do well to heed. That conscience is stronger than it has been for centuries. It says to the state quite simply and quite calmly that it cannot condone a continuance of the brutal and selfish and insensate policies which produced the terrible cataclysm of the World War. Is not the practice of this higher patriotism of Jeremiah our one great assurance that a repetition of that calamity will never take place? Alone and unaided, Jeremiah in his day was unable to prevent the continuance of policies which brought about the downfall of his nation. Is it too much to hope that the witness of the Church to-day in all the so-called nations of the earth shall be united and powerful enough to direct and influence the policies of our modern states in such fashion that our civilization shall not be plunged into death and ruin? But if this victory is to be won, there must be the same deep motive, the same faith in God, the same devotion to righteousness, the same unflinching courage which we find in Jeremiah. Jeremiah has done the world lasting and imperishable service by holding up before it an example of that enlightened and devoted patriotism which alone can save our modern world.

# CHAPTER XVII

## THE EXILE AND AFTER

Date, 586 B.C. Chapters, 40:1-6, 7-12; 31:1-6, 15-22, 23-30; 40:13-16; 41; 42; 43; 44.

JERUSALEM was captured by the Babylonians in the fourth month of the eleventh year of the reign of King Zedekiah. When the breach was finally made in the walls, the king and his bodyguard attempted to escape from the city by night. But the enemy pursued and overtook him and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar, who condemned him to a terrible fate. His sons were killed in his presence. Then his eyes were put out, and, blinded, he was carried away to Babylon and died in captivity. Jerusalem was burned to the ground, the Temple was destroyed, the walls were pulled down, the city lay in ruins. In addition to Zedekiah and the rulers of the people, the greater portion of the population of Jerusalem itself, and all who had deserted to the Chaldeans, were carried away captive. Only the peasants, the countrymen who lived in the immediate neighborhood of Jerusalem seem to have been left behind. Over this poor remnant of the people, a man named Gedaliah was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar. He is not, of course, to be confounded with the Gedaliah mentioned in chapter 38:1, a son of Pashhur (21:1), a prince in the reign of Zedekiah, who had doubtless been carried off to Babylon. Gedaliah the governor was a son of the Ahikam who had protected Jeremiah from the anti-Babylonian party

(26:24), and he may have been the grandson of Shaphan the pious scribe who had read the Book of the Laws before the good King Josiah (2 Kings 22). Thus all the traditions of his family were on the side of the prophetic party and Gedaliah himself was in sympathy with the aims and ideals of Jeremiah. He had doubtless been among the number who had sided with Jeremiah in seeking to dissuade Zedekiah and the rulers from their policy of revolt against Babylon. This had commended him to Nebuchadnezzar, who could not have made a better choice for a leader of the disorganized band of refugees who were to remain in their native land.

Two separate accounts are given to us of what befell Jeremiah during these fateful days. One of them occurs in chapter 39:3, 14. According to this story, as soon as the city was taken, the Babylonian leaders made haste to insure the safety of Jeremiah, and committed him for safe-keeping to Gedaliah. In chapter 40:1-6, however, we read that Jeremiah was carried off in chains together with the rest of the people of Jerusalem, and not until he came to Ramah was he liberated and given the choice whether to go to Babylon, or to remain with the people under Gedaliah. Many scholars have felt that these two accounts cannot be harmonized. Some have said that the first is the authentic story and the second is a legend. Others have turned it just the other way. Is it possible, some have asked, that Jeremiah was so well and so favorably known by the Babylonians that one of their first acts after taking the city was to make sure that no harm came to him?

There seems to be no solid reason, however, why one of these narratives should exclude the other. Taken together, they may well account for the fortunes of Jeremiah. That the part which he played during the siege should have been well known to the Babylonian leaders does not seem improbable, and it was but natural that they should have wished to show him clemency and consideration. They may already have chosen Gedaliah to be the governor of the refugees who were to be left behind, and he thus became the natural protector of the prophet.

A month elapsed before Nebuzaraden, the emissary of Nebuchadnezzar, arrived to wind up affairs in Jerusalem. In the meantime, Gedaliah seems to have gone to Mizpah, Jeremiah being left behind in the city. When, therefore, the population was put into chains and led away into captivity, Jeremiah shared their fate. It was not until the whole company reached Ramah, that Gedaliah heard about Jeremiah, intervened, and secured his liberty. It is at this point, therefore, that the narrative is resumed.

1. Chapter 40:1-6. At the request of Gedaliah, the captain of the guard ordered that Jeremiah should be freed. He was then allowed to choose whether to go with the rest of the captives to Babylon, or to remain with Gedaliah and the residue of the people in Judah. Jeremiah chose to remain. He could hardly have done otherwise. He was now an old man. He doubtless knew that under the leadership of the younger Ezekiel, the exiles were being well trained for the religious future which Jeremiah was convinced awaited them. Persuaded that the nation was finally to be restored in righteousness, his rôle must be to care for the remnant that remained. For this his strength was sufficient. He and Gedaliah were in heartiest sympathy. Together they could collaborate to lay the material and spiritual foundations of the new nation that was to be.

So Jeremiah went and dwelt with Gedaliah among the people that were left in the land (40:6). One cannot help reflecting how differently the life of Jeremiah would have ended had he gone to Babylon where he would have been treated with respect and have lived in comfort. Yet no one can wish that he had chosen otherwise. It is in keeping with the soul of Jeremiah that he should identify himself with the weakest remnant of the people. And his life is far nobler in its tragic close than had it ended in any other way.

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*40:1.* The opening words are a later insertion and do not belong here, since no prophecy of Jeremiah follows. *Verses 2, 3.* These verses must also be removed. We would hardly expect this heathen soldier to "instruct Jeremiah in his own theology." *Verse 5.* It is difficult to get the meaning of the first words of this verse. They should be omitted, and the words "Go back then" will connect with verse 4. *Verse 6. Mizpah* a city of Benjamin lying from four to five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

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2. Chapter 40:7-12. Bible readers get their idea of Nebuchadnezzar from the book of Daniel where he is described as an oriental despot, an object of religious loathing, a weak and superstitious monarch. All that we know of him from the book of Jeremiah, however, gives us a very different picture of the man. An able general, he seems also to have had broad and magnanimous policies in dealing with his defeated foes. We have seen how tolerant he was in dealing with Jerusalem after the revolt of Jehoiakim. Even now, after the treachery of Zedekiah, and after the

long arduous siege required before Jerusalem could be taken, he does not display the ruthlessness which might have been expected in his dealings with the Jews. It was inevitable that Jerusalem should be destroyed and that Zedekiah should be punished. But Nebuchadnezzar does not contemplate the destruction of the whole people, or the wasting of their land. Instead, he provides for the future of the Jewish people left in Palestine, and, as verse 12 of chapter 40 shows very clearly, the soldiery of Nebuchadnezzar had not devastated the territory surrounding Jerusalem.

Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar chose to be the governor of the remnant of the people who were to remain in Judæa, was an able and courageous man. The story of his administration, brief as it is, (Jeremiah 40:7-12, see 2 Kings 25:22-25) leaves no doubt about his ability as an administrator, or as to his nobility as a man. He addressed himself with courage to the difficult task of laying the foundations of a new state on the ruins of the former kingdom. He established his residence at Mizpah. This was a central location, only five miles from Jerusalem. Gedaliah expected to extend his rule over all of the surrounding, disorganized districts. He adopted from the first a magnanimous policy toward the leaders of the guerrilla bands who had harassed the Babylonian invaders, and had never been subdued. One by one these leaders reported to Gedaliah, who neither arrested nor disarmed them, but treated them as comrades and sent them back to their own villages to establish order and begin the labor of harvesting the autumn crops. Thus, within the space of a very short time, out of the terror and chaos of the siege, there came this period of peace and prosperity. It even began to appear that a restored people could realize in time their spiritual destiny. What all of this must have meant to Jeremiah, we can easily imagine. An immense burden must have rolled off his soul. For forty years, he had been condemned to the task of prophesying the downfall of his people as a just punishment for their sins. That judgment had been vindicated. That work had been done. That punishment had performed its terrible work of national purification. All of this was now behind Jeremiah, and he was free to look forward into what the future held in store.

As we have seen, all through our study, Jeremiah had never lost hope in the ultimate restoration of the people. He had never ceased to believe that it was in and through His people, that God was to bring His gracious promises of redemption to pass. His letter to the exiles[1] showed his faith in the spiritual future of the remnant who sojourned in Babylon. And, now, under his eyes, there began to disclose itself the beginnings of a new order in Judæa itself. Why should not Jeremiah believe that at last the worst was over, that the future was bright with promise, that when the exiles returned, themselves purified from the past and trained in the Word and Will of the Lord, they would find a spiritual commonwealth awaiting them, on the basis of which the new state should rise in glory and strength, "in which religion would find its perfect embodiment?"

Thus, this short period of a few months must have been the happiest part of Jeremiah's long life—the only really happy period in his life. Around him, he saw the people settling down in their homes and villages. Under Nebuchadnezzar's benignant rule, the people were guaranteed a peaceful life. Gedaliah, who had won the confidence both of Nebuchadnezzar and the native rulers, was in a position to bring the maximum of prosperity to the land.[2] And the soul of Jeremiah, released from the terrible pressure of the past years, was free at last to give utterance to its faith in God, its hopes for the people, and its glowing expectations of a reunited, renewed and restored people.[3]

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[1] See chapter XIV, p. 250.

It is to this period, therefore, of Jeremiah's life that there may be assigned with some confidence certain portions of the *Book of Hope*[4] of which mention was made in a previous chapter. It seems but natural that some poems looking forward to a bright future for the people should have been composed while the heart and soul of Jeremiah were at last in peace, when the prospect which disclosed itself to his spiritual vision was no longer heavy with the black clouds of fate. These fragments are to be found in chapter 31, which contains the New Covenant (verses 31-34). We have found solid reasons for believing that this belongs to Jeremiah and constitutes the climax of his spiritual teaching.[5] In this same chapter are other passages which seem to bear the impress of Jeremiah's spirit, and to have the likelihood of being his work, at this brief happy interlude in his otherwise tragic career.

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[2] The phrase to "stand before," in 40:10, doubtless means "to intercede" (see Jeremiah 15:1).

[3] This picture of the conditions in Palestine after the Exile is not in harmony with the account which we find in Ezekiel 33:21, 24-26. But (a) it would not be surprising if one writing from a distance should have a different impression from one on the ground; and (b) it is not certain that the two accounts refer to the same epoch. It is possible that Ezekiel refers to the state of things in Palestine after the flight into Egypt.

[4] See chapter XV, pp. 294-296.

[5] See chapter XIII of this book.

3. Chapter 31:1-6, 15-22, 23-28. These poems are all undated. Some scholars have placed them among the earliest of the prophet's oracles.[6] There is no reason, however, why they may not be among his latest. The chapter stands midway in the book. You may carry it forward as well as backward. If perfection of style counts for anything, they may well be late, for they are admittedly among the finest products of Jeremiah's poetical genius.

The second of these poems is appropriately called "The Voice from Ramah." What is more natural than that Jeremiah while he himself was at Ramah (40:1) after the destruction of Jerusalem, should hear the voice of the Mother of Israel who longs for all of her children, the children of Joseph, as well as those of Benjamin. There is no inherent reason why Jeremiah should not return at the close of his career to the same glowing hope which had animated him at the first (chapter 3:16-18). If these poems in chapter 31 are assigned to the early period, we have nothing left from the prophet during a time of peace and happiness when we should expect precisely such utterances as these. "It is indeed incredible that after such a crisis as the destruction of the Holy City and the exile of her people, and with the new situation and prospect of Israel before him, the Prophet should have had nothing to say."[7] We may, therefore, with some confidence assign these poems to this brief, quiet period of peace and hope, at the end of Jeremiah's life.

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[6] So Peake, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 90-91, who finds difficulty in placing any of the material in chapters 30-31 after the fall of Jerusalem.

[7] George Adam Smith, ibid., p. 293.

(1) Chapter 31:1-6.[8] The opening verse of this section may be by the hand of the editor, but the rest of the poem belongs without much question to Jeremiah himself. The prophet includes the Northern Kingdom in this love poem in which the promise of forgiveness and restoration is set forth in beautiful form. It is an ideal picture of the prosperity that is to dawn upon the land when its spiritual destiny has been fulfilled. It is thus translated by George Adam Smith:[9]

Verse 2. Grace have they found in the desert,
The people escaped from the sword;
While Israel makes for his rest from afar
The Lord appears to him:
'With a love from of old have I loved thee,
So in troth I (now) draw thee.
'I will rebuild thee and built shalt thou be
Maiden of Israel!
'Again thou shalt take thee thy timbrels
And forth to the merrymen's dances.
'Again shall vineyards be planted
On the hills of Samaria,
'Planters shall surely plant them (?)
And forthwith enjoy (their fruit).
'For comes the day when the watchmen are calling
On Ephraim's mountains:
'Rise let us go up to Sion
To the Lord our God.'

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[8] The section from verse 7 to verse 15 must be regarded as an insertion by some post-exilic author, who edited this portion of the book. For, in these verses the deliverance from the exile is on the eve of accomplishment, and the passage as a whole reads very much like one from Second Isaiah. Verses 7-15 are therefore not to be regarded as by Jeremiah, or as a part of his prophetical writing. The same holds true of verses 23-30 which gives us a description of a similar restoration of Judah.

[9] *Jeremiah,* published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York, pp. 298-9.

*31:2.* The word *wilderness* here is a figurative expression for "exile" and the verse means that Israel (i.e. the Northern Kingdom) in its captivity has found favor and will be restored. *Verse 3. Of old.* A better reading is "from afar" (see 30:10, 51:50), meaning that Jehovah from far-away Palestine appears as a Deliverer to His people. This verse belongs to the most wonderful sayings in the Bible (cf. Hosea 11:3). *Verse 4.* Jeremiah here describes the happy village wedding festivals as he had seen them. *Tabret* is our *"tamborine"*; cf. Exodus 15:20, 21; Judges 11:34. Modern dancing has become so secular that it is difficult for us to conceive of it, as here, as a religious exercise; cf. 2 Samuel 6:14. *Verse 5. Mountains of Samaria* (Amos 3:9) means the country in general. The replanting of the vineyard implies a secure and permanent reoccupation of the land; cf. Isaiah 5:1, Micah 4:4. *Verse 6.* Here the prophet seems to look forward to a spiritual reconciliation and reunion of the Hebrew people which will find its outward expression in a common worship of God at Jerusalem. It is a fine feature of this anticipation that the Ephraimites of themselves propose that they go to Jerusalem for this purpose.

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(2) 31:15-22. This beautiful passage is one of the most eloquent in the entire book, and one of the most familiar, and it plainly reveals the depth and tenderness of the prophet's spiritual genius. Its subject is the return of the Northern Tribes symbolized under the name of Ephraim. Rachel is represented as weeping for the children she has lost, the Northern Tribes who have gone into exile. Since Jeremiah came from the tribe of Benjamin, it was natural for him to

have sympathy with Ephraim who also was a son of Rachel.

> It is no mere poetical figure, as a modern reader would naturally regard it, but the tribal ancestress is stirred from her rest in the grave to wail for the sons of whom she has been bereaved. The shrill lamentation is heard beyond the limits of her tomb, and, like her husband (Genesis 37:35), she refused to be comforted.[10]

Verse 15. Hark! In Ramah is heard lamentation—
Bitterest weeping!
'Tis Rachael o'er her children weeping,
Refusing comfort!
Verse 16. (Thus saith Yahwe:)
'Refrain thy voice from weeping—
Thine eyes from tears!
For a guerdon awaits thy labour:
Their return from the enemy's land!'[11]

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*31:15. Ramah.* A small village about five miles north of Jerusalem, the traditional site of Rachel's tomb. The passage does not mention the grave of Rachel. For the site of the grave see Genesis 35:16-20, 48:7; 1 Samuel 10:2. Ephrath has been identified with Bethlehem (hence St. Matthew 2:17, 18) but this can hardly be correct. Rachel had no connection with Judah and the passage in 1 Samuel is explicit in placing the grave to the north of Jerusalem and not to the south. *Verse 18.* If this verse is used in a spiritual sense, the idea is that if the Lord will turn the heart of Ephraim toward Him, Ephraim will obediently respond. It is probable, however, that for "turn" we should read "return," and that the sense is "bring me back to my own land, and I will return"; cf. 4:1. *Verse 19. Surely . . . repented.* This is a difficult clause for which many explanations have been offered. Repentance usually precedes returning to God. Some amend the text to read: "After I turned from thee, I repented." If, however, the verb "turn" in verse 18 is translated "return," it may have this meaning in verse 19: "After that I returned to Palestine, I repented all over again and with a deeper sense of guilt, the sin that had made me leave it." . . . *Reproach of youth,* i.e. the sins of my youth. *Verse 20.* A beautiful soliloquy in which the prophet boldly speaks of God in the terms of a human father. For *speak against Him* we should substitute "speak of Him." *Verse 21.* The *"waymarks"* may be waymarks of the spirit. In this case we escape the difficulty that signposts are not usually erected by travelers themselves. The passage should probably not be pressed too literally. *Verse 22.* The word *"backsliding"* strikes a discordant note. The word "despoiled" should probably be substituted. It involves the change of only two consonants in the text. The last clause in this verse, "A woman shall encompass a man," has bewildered the scholars who present an astonishing array of solutions.[12] The point seems to be that Israel, a weak, irresolute, timid woman will be "turned into" a strong, brave man. This characteristically oriental idea requires only a slight emendation of the text (whereby "encompass" becomes "be turned into") and is in harmony with what has preceded.

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[10] Peake, Vol. 2, p. 91.
[11] Trans. Skinner, op. cit., p. 301.

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[12] See Peake, Vol. 2, pp. 95-97.

(3) Chapter 31:23-30.[13] Only one other small poem can with any probability be credited to Jeremiah, although it contains certain marks of a later date. To the preceding promise of a restored Israel is added this prophecy of a redeemed Judah:[14]

Verse 23. Thus saith the Lord:
Once more shall they speak this word.
In Judah's land and her towns,
When I turn again their captivity:
'The Lord thee bless, homestead of justice!'
In Judah and all her towns shall be dwelling
Tillers and they that roam with flocks,
For I have refreshed the weary soul,
And cheered every soul that was pining.

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*Verse 23. Yet again.* This implies that city and Temple had been destroyed so that such speech could not be used at the time this was written. *Habitation,* lit. "homestead," i.e. the land of Judah. *Mountain of holiness.* This may be the mountainous Judah, or Jerusalem, or the Temple (see Zechariah 8:3). *Verse 24.* There will be no fear of the spoiler. *Verse 26.* It is difficult to credit this confession of disillusion to Jeremiah. It is probably the insertion of a reader who felt that such a dream was "too good to be true." *Verse 27.* For the metaphor cf. Ezekiel 36:9-11, Hosea 2:23. See also Isaiah 26:16-19. Israel and Judah whose future blessedness have been separately described are now united. This hope lay very near the heart of Jeremiah. *Verses 29-30.* A popular proverb is here quoted. Ezekiel also is familiar with it (Ezekiel 18:2). Both prophets have to contend with people who feel that they have been unjustly treated. Their fathers may have eaten sour grapes. But that is no reason why their children's teeth should be set on edge. Ezekiel meets the difficulty by seeking to point out that only the guilty soul shall be punished, and that the sins of the fathers shall not be visited on the children (Ezekiel 18:20). In this passage Jeremiah quotes the proverb only to point out that it will not apply to conditions in the Restoration since only that man who has himself eaten the sour grapes will have his teeth set on edge.

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[13] Peake (Vol. 2, p. 97) doubts if Jeremiah wrote this passage, and assigns it to the editor. He finds in it so many similarities with verses 12-14 that he feels that the same view must be taken of both passages.

[14] Trans. George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah,* published by Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York, pp. 305-6.

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In such lyrical fashion did Jeremiah pour out his heart as, destruction and doom being passed, he looked forward to the material prosperity of a reunited land, in which a spiritual religion was to have its central place and inspiration. It is no wonder that the compiler of this Book of Hope closed it with the proclamation of the New Covenant; for, whatever the date of this remarkable document, it furnishes a fitting spiritual climax to the poems which have preceded it.

4. Chapter 40:13-16; 41:1-18. Suddenly, but not without warning, all of these bright prospects were dashed to the ground, and the scene was quickly changed from one of peace and hope to ruin, chaos and irretrievable disaster. Gedaliah, the generous and capable governor, was assassinated by a fanatic by the name of Ishmael, and the people were thrown into a panic. Fearing punishment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, they rushed headlong into Egypt carrying with them Baruch and Jeremiah who had

vainly sought to restrain them from their impetuous and reckless flight.

Gedeliah had been warned. One of the chiefs, Johanan by name, had informed him that Ishmael was conspiring against him. Johanan even offered to put Ishmael out of the way, if Gedaliah would give him permission to do so. Gedaliah, however, refused to believe the story of Ishmael's treachery and ordered Johanan to do him no harm. Gedaliah paid dearly for his generosity.

What motive impelled Ishmael to perform this dastardly deed which struck down at a blow every hope that the people had for material and moral self-recovery, has been much discussed. The text says that he was in league with the king of Ammon who desired to have this new and growing community removed before it became a political obstacle between him and the Mediterranean. Ishmael, however, may have had other motives. As a "super-patriot" he may have resented Gedaliah's subservience to the Babylonians. Also personal vengeance may have prompted him to kill the commoner Gedaliah who had been put over the state instead of Ishmael himself who had royal blood in his veins (41:1). At any rate, he was one of those hot-headed fanatics who, from time to time upset human progress and change the course of history.

Not content with the murder of Gedaliah, Ishmael and his crew perpetrated an atrocity for which there seems no reasonable explanation. They waylaid and ruthlessly butchered a company of inoffensive pilgrims, who were on their way from the North to lament the destruction of the Holy City. Only ten of the number were spared who offered to reveal the hiding-place of secret stores. It must have been sheer insanity and lust for blood which prompted a massacre so foul and unprovoked. Then Ishmael herded all the people of Mizpah together and headed for Ammon beyond Jordan. Thus in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, the outlook was all changed, and Jeremiah was plunged once more in the darkness of misery for himself, and for the people whom he loved.

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*41:1.* Compare 2 Kings 25:25. *Verse 4. Second day,* i.e. the next day. *Verse 5. The house of the Lord,* i.e. the site of the Temple, which had, of course, been destroyed. *Verse 6. Weeping all along as he went.* It is hard to believe that Ishmael wept in pretended sympathy. "He" should be changed to "they": "as they were going along and weeping." When the pilgrims reached Mizpah, they would have a view of the ruined city which caused them to burst out into weeping. *Verse 9. By the side of Gedaliah.* It is not clear what this means. The text is unintelligible. The *pit,* i.e. a cistern. Cf. 1 Kings 15:22 for the reference to Asa, where, however, the provision of the cistern is not mentioned. *Verse 10. The King's daughters.* Not necessarily the daughters of Zedekiah, but the princesses of the royal house. It is noteworthy that Nebuchadnezzar left these in Palestine.

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At this point in the story, Johanan comes to the front. It was he who had warned Gedaliah that Ishmael was plotting against him. When he heard of the murder of the governor and the attempt of Ishmael to drive the people over the Jordan into the hands of the king of Ammon, he hastily assembled a band of soldiers, gave chase, overtook Ishmael and the refugees, fought and defeated him, and liberated the people who were overjoyed at this unexpected deliverance. Then he turned about face, and escorted the people back to their homes once more. Ishmael and a bodyguard escaped, fled to Ammon, and we hear nothing more of him. The people back in their homes were so panic-stricken, however, that they were unable to settle down again in their peaceful pursuits, and, in deathly fear of the Chaldeans, proposed a precipitate flight into Egypt.

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*41:12. Gibeon,* about a mile north of Mizpah (see 28:1). For these waters, see the pool mentioned in 2 Samuel 2:13. *Verse 14. Cast about* = turned about. *Verse 16.* The reading cannot be correct. It should be changed to read: "All the remnant of the people whom Ishmael . . . had carried away captive from Mizpah." *Verse 17. Geruth Chimham* is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament. For Chimham see 2 Samuel 19:37-40.

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5. Chapter 42, chapter 43:1-7. During all of these terrible events, we have heard nothing of Jeremiah. What befell him; whether he was among the refugees who were hurried toward Ammon by Ishmael —of all of this and more, we are ignorant. At this crisis, however, in the fortunes of the people, he emerges once more into that position of spiritual prominence which he has occupied for all these years in the strange, tragic and checkered career of the Jewish people. Should they return into Egypt or not? To go or not to go, that was the question. In this final crisis in their history, the leaders turn to the aged

prophet for whose word from the Lord they had been accustomed to turn; whose word from the Lord, with equal regularity, they had been accustomed to disobey.

"And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah" (verse 7). Ten days! Why should Jeremiah have needed ten days to get a message from the Lord on such a subject as this? It is hard to believe that Jeremiah himself had any question regarding the proposed abandonment of their land for the fleshpots of Egypt. Every instinct in his nature must have risen up in protest against the idea. Just on this account, it may be, he took much time in his communion with God. He must be sure that there was no human admixture of opinion in the answer he should return to the people. It must be a word of God, and not the prejudice or preference of Jeremiah. This careful refining, as it were, of the idea, so that the judgment should be no alloy, but the pure gold of the Will of God, took time. It is something of a comfort to those who so often have difficulty in determining the Will of God, the answer to whose prayers is not immediate and final, to discover that sometimes even prophetic inspiration and illumination came gradually and that the final certitude which came to Jeremiah was the result of prolonged struggles and wrestling in prayer.

But if the delay was necessary for Jeremiah, it was unfortunate in its effect upon the mind of the people. Proportionately as the conviction was strengthened in Jeremiah's mind that the people should remain, the impulse to flee gained headway in the mind of the people. As day after day passed and the prophet still delayed to speak, the panic of fear increased and spread until it became uncontrollable. At last the prophet was ready with his answer. The people must abide in their land and not fear the Chaldeans. To flee would be an act of apostasy and cowardice. They would be turning their backs upon their destiny, abandoning their faith in God, losing their birthright.

But Jeremiah spoke too late. He confronted, when at last he could speak with conviction, an hysterical people who were determined to flee and looked only to the prophet for some confirmation from him of a course of action on which their minds were irrevocably set. In answer to this word of the prophet, delivered with all of his accustomed energy and conviction, the leaders of the people did not scruple to reply that he had spoken falsely; that it was not a word of God which he had uttered, but merely the opinion of Baruch, who had persuaded him to give this opinion in order that the people might be delivered into the hands of the Chaldeans. Then the leaders marshaled the people, "every person that Nebuzaradan . . . had left with Gedaliah . . . and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah, and they came into the land of Egypt."

Here was a "Return of the Mayflower" indeed! Let the Bible reader turn back to the book of Exodus and read once more the old story of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, and then read this pathetic and humiliating story of the voluntary return after their centuries of life in the "Promised Land" of this wretched remnant of the people, and he will have compassed the whole tragic story of a people whose persistent moral disobedience of the Will of God had brought about this incredible reversal of their fortunes. It did not take forty years for the return through the wilderness to Egypt. Moral retrogression is always swifter than moral advance. Neither was any moral leader like Moses needed. Neither do we read that they were nourished by any miraculous quail or manna. For now their moral destiny is forever behind them. They are fleeing from the Promise, they are deserters of the Cause. And their life goes out in oblivion and obloquy in the very Egypt from which they had once set out on their Pilgrim's Progress to the Promised Land.

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*42:1.* In some way, unknown to us, the lives of Jeremiah and Baruch had been spared. *Verse 5.* This verse contains a hint of Jeremiah's own opinion. But he has sworn (verse 4) that the judgment he will return will be the very Will of God. *Verse 7.* "This verse is very important for the insight it gives us into the nature of prophecy." It was not simply his own desire or opinion which he uttered, but the Word of God. *Verse 10. I repent me.* These words of course do not express regret, but a changed attitude toward the people now that their punishment has gone into effect. *Verse 12. To return.* This reading should be changed to "to dwell." *Verses 15-19.* These verses are doubtless a later addition and should be omitted in the reading. Verse 19 follows directly and naturally after verse 14. It is apparent to Jeremiah as he speaks that the people do not approve and are not prepared to accept his message. *Verse 19.* We should probably read: "This is the word of the Lord." *Chapter 43:1.* The people had heard Jeremiah through without interruption. *Verse 2. Saying unto:* read "defying." *Verse 3.* The verse is important showing the prominence of Baruch, and his well-known intimacy with Jeremiah. The people believe that by now Baruch has the aged prophet completely under his influence. *Verse 5.* All that is meant is the reassembling of the Jews in their territory after the chaos and disorder of the siege.

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6. Chapter 43:8-13; chapter 44. It seems beyond measure pitiful that the life of Jeremiah should end in this miserable fashion. If only we could have left the weary old man in Palestine, coöperating with Gedaliah in laying the foundations of that spiritual commonwealth that was to be, his heart full of happy hopes as he looked into the future! But to be dragged away into Egypt, out of the land which he loved, for which he had labored, and in whose spiritual future he so passionately believed, to share the wretched and ignominious fate of this band of faithless refugees, this seems an incredible end to so noble a life. Yet, from the point of view of spiritual biography, of the drama of a human soul, nothing could have been more eloquent, more superb. Once more before the light of this man's soul goes out forever into the brightness of eternity, we are to see it flash forth in undiminished splendor. Against the darkest background, his unflinching faith, and invincible courage is to show itself in a way to command our undying admiration. The book of Jeremiah thus ends as such a book should end. The entire story has shown us a spare, gaunt, tragical figure, standing upright in the midst of such a welter of human fortunes as history has rarely witnessed, speaking out in hoarse and fearless tones the Word and the Will of God to his recreant countrymen. He has seen the whole edifice of nation and religion fall down into ruin; indeed he has helped to pull it down. And he has stood calm and unmoved in the midst of the national débris, insisting that the ruin was inevitable, and pointing to a spiritual hope that

lay beyond disaster. How should the life of such a man end? It is one of the immortal characteristics of the book of Jeremiah that it gives us at the end of the book one more glimpse of the splendor of this man's soul, and shows him at the end just as we have seen him all through the history of these forty terrible years.

Are we to hear from Jeremiah once more? Or has the murder of Gedaliah, the dashing of all his hopes for the remnant in Israel, the refusal of the people to listen to his message, the insensate flight into Egypt at last broken the heart and forever silenced the voice of this intrepid spirit? The concluding chapters of the record of his life give the answer. When all the circumstances are borne in mind, these chapters, it must be affirmed, contain the loftiest and most sustained spiritual eloquence which the world has ever heard except the Words from the Cross of Calvary.

The wretched, panic-stricken band of fugitives have arrived at Tahpanhes (43:7, cf. 2:16), a frontier town lying on the highway between Palestine and Egypt. There they halted. At last they felt they were safe. Were they not now under the protection of Egypt? Was it not possible that in some future day Egypt would again challenge and overthrow Babylon? Then would come a second deliverance for them, a second and more glorious exodus, another entrance into the Promised Land. Without doubt the people were congratulating themselves and saying all kinds of hopeful things to themselves. There was a kind of general thanksgiving that they found themselves safely back in Egypt once more.

"Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes" (43:8). What, we are tempted to ask, is not this man's soul burned out yet? Is it capable of receiving another of these tragic, awful inspirations, and delivering it out of his soul into the mind and heart of the people? After all, the man is flesh and blood. There is some limit to the endurance of body if not of soul. Also, one might say, of what use further expenditure of spiritual energy? To what end is prophecy now to be directed? This motley mob has no future. It is to disappear into oblivion. But it is not to be allowed to disappear cherishing any moral illusions. It is to go informed and instructed into its eternal darkness. The Word of the Lord is to shine clear and bright to the last. At this supreme moment of his career, the soul of Jeremiah shows no weakening. There is here no falling off in inspiration, no decline in spiritual energy. The outward man might perish, but the inward man was renewed day by day. And while the people were congratulating themselves on their safety, and on their future deliverance, suddenly the Word of the Lord in the mouth of Jeremiah came crashing athwart their hopes just as it had done for forty long years.

It is a strange picture which they saw. They saw this old man carrying heavy stones and putting them down one by one under the threshold of the entrance into the palace of Pharaoh at Tahpanhes. And after he has them all laid, suddenly he turns and faces the people and cries that on those very stones Nebuchadnezzar will set his throne. The people by their act of desertion have not escaped their doom. The long arm of the Babylonian king will reach them even there. Let them not delude themselves with false hopes. God has set forces in motion which will spell the ruin of Egypt and the destruction of this faithless remnant of His people.

> To an audience familiar with this almost magical efficacy of prophets' words and acts, an act of this kind must have appealed with a force we can hardly imagine. They would feel themselves to be present when new forces were being released; they stood at the fountain-head of a new current in history; it sets in motion the train of events which leads up to its realization.[15]

Thus once more we see Jeremiah in his familiar rôle. And his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. It is the old deep boom of his artillery to which we are again listening, as the prophecy of punishment and ruin for sin and desertion is uttered with the same reverberation of conviction, the same detonation of an inspired conscience.

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*43:8.* The narrative is from the pen of Baruch. The message seems to have come to Jeremiah shortly after the arrival at Tahpanhes. *Verse 9.* The text is probably corrupt. Instead of the words "in mortar," we should read "in secret," and omit the words "in the brickwork." The verse will thus read: "and hide them in secret at the entry." This uncanny scene was probably enacted at night, so as not to attract the attention of the population; but still in the sight of the Jews (see Ezekiel 12:7). *Pharaoh's house,* i.e. his residence if he happened to be at Tahpanhes. *Verse 10. Royal pavilion.* This may mean carpet or throne or the pavilion itself—anything pertaining to the king's royal state. *Verse 12. He*

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[15] Peake, Vol. II, pp. 198, 199. "Obscure references in both Babylonian and Egyptian inscriptions combine to make it probable that a Babylonian invasion of Egypt took place in the year 568 B.C. . . ." Skinner, ibid., p. 341. By that time Jeremiah was without doubt no longer alive.

*shall array.* The idea of clothing oneself in a country is very strange. It may mean that Nebuchadnezzar will possess himself of Egypt as easily as a shepherd will throw his garment around himself. *Verse 13* may be an addition, since the idea does not harmonize with the end of the preceding verse. *Beth-shemesh.* Probably to be identified with Hieropolis, as in the margin.

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A final message from Jeremiah is preserved for us in chapter 44. The narrative in this chapter has been so much expanded by subsequent additions and editing that it is difficult to make out the exact situation. Through the maze of uncertainty, however, the voice of Jeremiah reaches us, clear and convincing as at the very first. It is an unshaken bugle note that sounds from his lips for the last time across a dark and dismal scene of apostasy and shame.

Thus far the people had held at least to a nominal faith in Jehovah. But back in Egypt, they asked themselves what had their faith availed them? Where had it landed them? They had trusted that their God would give them a victory. They had experienced nothing but defeat. He was to be their Defender. But from what had He defended them? They were back where they had started generations before under the leadership of Moses. To what end all their privations? And where was the fulfillment of the promise? May not their troubles have been due to the fact that they had not respected and honored the gods of the lands which they had occupied? If they had been more deferential to these deities might not these have come to the rescue of the people when they were beleaguered and besieged? Such seem to be the dark, ominous, superstitious ideas which now invaded the mind of the people. They felt themselves absolved from the service of a God who had not protected them. Having lost their land, the people are now about to lose their God. The scene in the Garden of Eden once more seems about to be enacted. The women take the lead in burning incense to other gods, and especially to the Queen of Heaven (verses 15-20). It is on such a scene that Jeremiah gazes at the very end of his life. He had looked upon the same scene at the beginning of his ministry in the days of Manasseh. Forty years had he labored for the people, pouring out the treasures of his soul, omitting nothing of warning, supplication or promise, and the last sight on which his eye rests is the burning of incense and the offering of sacrifices to the strange gods of the heathen.

Once more the prophet speaks. He does not turn away in the silence of disgust. He utters his last word of denunciation, his last prediction of their punishment and ruin. No matter how inveterate the challenge of evil, how obstinate the contradiction of sin, the soul of this man was equal to the trial of its faith. Jeremiah never faltered to the last. He never gave up, never failed. Rarely if ever in human history has character been put to such a test, or triumphed over such a "contradiction of sinners."

It is hard from the prolix narrative in chapter 44 to make out just what had happened. At first, the account reads as if Jeremiah had issued a kind of pastoral letter to all the Jews who had now settled in various parts of Egypt. But when we come to verse 15, we find ourselves in the midst of a great assembly of all the Jews in Egypt. Jeremiah had apparently finished speaking to them, and now they are answering him. Later on in the chapter the discussion seems to take place between Jeremiah and the women in the assembly, who are bent on worshiping the Queen of Heaven. It is, therefore, difficult to take the chapter as the work of one author. The simplest solution is to imagine that the historical kernel of the chapter is the dispute between the women and the prophet. This was later amplified to a great assembly of all the Jews, and still later, it may be, to a kind of encyclical from Jeremiah against all Jewish religious practices in Egypt. The only sections in the chapter, therefore, which we may assign with assurance to the memoirs of Baruch, are verses 15-20, 24-26. Portions of Baruch's writing may also be preserved in verses 1-14, 26-30.

This passage has, aside from its biographical interest, great religious importance. It shows, for this remnant of the people, at least, the complete breakdown of the Reform of Deuteronomy, and a reversion to the religious practices of the reign of Manasseh. The women, at least, have come to date all their disasters from the drastic destruction by the reformers of all shrines and altars to other gods. They do not object to the worship of Jehovah, but they object to His exclusive worship. An insult has been done to other gods, and especially to the Queen of Heaven, which must be removed before prosperity can again come to them. The worship of the Queen of Heaven—the goddess Ishtar—was a Babylonian form of idolatry which must have been witnessed many times by Jeremiah in the streets of Jerusalem (see chapter 7:17ff.). Since we read that the royal princesses were among those whom Johanan had taken along into Egypt (chapter 41:10, 43:6), these may have been the leaders in the effort to restore this form of pagan worship. The moral turpitude of the people is shown by the fact that instead of interpreting their disasters as a punishment from God for their faithlessness to Him, they explain their misfortunes on the ground of their faithlessness to other gods.

It was this evidence of their religious depravity which roused Jeremiah to the last word which fell from his lips of which we have any record. But this last word is as direct and terrible as any he has ever uttered. His conscience has not lost its fire nor his spirit its fighting edge. The prophet makes no effort to dissuade the women from their idolatries, "but with scathing irony he hands them over to their reprobate and superstitious mind":

Verse 25. Thus speaks Yahwe, Israel's God:
Ye women! Ye have spoken with your mouth,
  And performed it with your hands!
'We will assuredly fulfil our vows which we have vowed,
  To burn sacrifice to the Queen of Heaven
And pour out to her libations.'
  Hold, then, to your words,
And do according to your vows!
  By My great name I swear
Saith Yahwe!
  That My name shall no more be heard
In the mouth of any man of Judah
  In all the land of Egypt.
Then shall all the remnant of Judah know
  Whose word it is that stands![16]

"Whose word it is that stands!" Let this be Jeremiah's last word to his people and to the world. He has never doubted the Word of God. From the beginning to the end of his ministry in spite of travail of soul and opposition of circumstance, he has been a faithful witness of the Word of God. And this last glimpse that we have of him shows him standing erect amid the ruins of all his earthly hopes, the unwilling captive of a reprobate people, telling them that true religion shall become extinct among them—that they shall have no religious future whatever, but that the Word of God shall stand forever. It is a magnificent exhibition of a soul that nothing could daunt or make afraid. Instinctively we uncover before it. Such a spectacle compels our veneration, as no other character in all Old Testament history.

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[16] Trans. Skinner, op. cit., pp. 344, 345.

The words of Jeremiah the prophet are ended.

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*44:1.* Recent discoveries have proved the presence of Jews at this time at Pathros, in Upper Egypt. Migdol was a frontier town, not far from Tahpanhes. Noph is probably to be identified with Memphis, the capital of Lower Egypt (see 2:16). *Verses 3-6.* For these heathen sacrifices, see 1:16; 7:18. *Verse 7.* For the expression *against your own souls,* cf. 26:19 (A.V.). *Verse 12,* cf. 42:18. *Verse 15.* If any "such great assembly" was held, it was probably some religious festival at which Jews from their different localities had come together. Once arrived, they had begun their preparations for the worship of the Queen of Heaven. The goddess is Ishtar, to be identified with the planet Venus. *Verse 18. Since we left off,* i.e. at the time of the Reformation, although it may have been resumed during the reign of Jehoiakim.[17] All subsequent misfortunes are here attributed to the wrath of the neglected Queen of Heaven. *Verse 19. Cakes to worship.* The R. V. margin has "pourtray." It is possible that cakes were made in the image of the goddess. *Without our husbands.* According to Numbers 30:4-17, women needed their husbands' consent before their vows were valid. The implication is that this consent has been obtained, so that if Jeremiah now has any quarrel, it is with their husbands and not with the women. *Verse 25. "Ye and your wives" read* "ye women." It is the women who are addressed. Ironically they are told to go ahead with their sacrifices. *Verses 26-28.* The reading in the text is contradictory; cf. 27b, 28. The idea of verse 27 must be not that all the Jews will be exterminated, but that the religion of Jehovah in Egypt will become extinct. *Verse 30.* This verse implying that the enemy of Hophra is not Nebuchadnezzar agrees so closely with history that some consider that it must have been written after the event.

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[17] See 7:18, and cf., chapter X, p. 144.

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No word reaches us from the prophet after this final denunciation of the people. Silence settles down over the man and his fate. With this last scene, the curtain falls. It is not conceivable that the man can have lived much longer. He was now nearly seventy years old, and his life had been one of unimaginable hardship. He may have lingered a little longer and then died a natural death. Tradition has it that he was murdered at last by an infuriated people. There is nothing unlikely in this, and some scholars hold that Baruch's biography originally closed with a narrative of his martyrdom, which the editors, for shame, excluded when the book of Jeremiah was finally compiled. On his tombstone, if any were erected, might well be written the words: "A Full End." [18]

Like many other great men, Jeremiah was despised while he lived, but came, after his death, to be honored and revered. "Some men's failures," George Macdonald has said, "are eternities beyond other men's successes." The beauty and pathos of his life became a kind of national tradition. It may have lain in the mind of the unknown prophet of the Exile who wrote of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah, chapter 53). "The long, slow martyrdom which he endured cast a halo around his memory" (Peake). Imagery from the scenes of his life and echoes of his words are to be found throughout the Psalms. Jesus at the end of His life when He instituted the Lord's Supper went back to Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant and its realization in His own sacrifice on the Cross.[19] Thus Jeremiah comes very close to us. In no prophet of the Old Testament is the spirit of Christianity so deeply revealed. We owe an imperishable debt of gratitude to this devoted, heroic servant of God who, in those terrible days, prepared in his own character and teaching for the coming of the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world.

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[18] Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible,* Vol. 2, p. 571.

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[19] St. Luke 22:20.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## THE RELIGION OF JEREMIAH

THUS ends the career of this intrepid spirit whose spiritual pilgrimage we have been able to follow over a long and tragic period of more than forty years. His contribution to religion was twofold. There was his teaching; but over and above his teaching, there was the man himself.[1] A beautiful characterization of the man is given to us by Peake,[2] in the introduction to his commentary on the book of Jeremiah:

> He was by nature an exquisite and sensitive spirit, too delicate and too fragile it might have seemed for the rough life of conflict in which his calling engaged him; too shy and nervous to face without shrinking the derision and curses of his fellows. He loved his people with that pure intensity of feeling and lucid insight which makes men's common patriotism seem a trivial and tawdry thing. He saw all their sin and folly with unblinded eyes, and recoiled from it in loathing. He would rather have taken the comfortless khan in the desert for his abode than breathe the poisoned air of his native land. Gentle and trustful, he seemed no match for the open violence or secret treachery which he again and again encountered. And yet through his long ministry

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[1] "Jeremiah utters truths which are revolutionary in their profound spirituality, but he does more. In himself he presents us with a new type of the religious life more near than anything else in the Old Testament to the normal Christian experience." J. R. Gilles, *Jeremiah the Man and the Message*, p. 17.

[2] "Jeremiah," *The Century Bible,* Vol. I, pp. 28ff.

of forty years, he faced his foes with that loftiest courage which triumphs over nature, rebuked his people with relentless severity and contradicted their dearest prejudices. There is no wrath so terrible as the "wrath of the Lamb," and Jeremiah's wrath was of that type. The feminine strain was very marked in his nature, in his love, his tenderness, the sure delicacy of his intuition, his reliance on a stronger arm, his exultation in submission to a stronger will after ineffective struggles against it. He knew what it was, like Paul, to kick vainly against the goad and to bear about unceasing pain in his heart for his kinsmen according to the flesh. Of kinsmen according to the spirit, he had but few: none, indeed. Such was the penalty of genius, in the full sense of the term. It was his fate to be shut out from those joys for which his appreciation was so keen, for which he seemed so fitted by nature. He felt his isolation, his exclusion from the common life of his fellows, its innocent pleasures, its grateful relaxations. With a mind turned in upon itself or its relations to God, turned outward on the inevitable fate of his people and the sin to which it was due, he brooded in solitude. His spirit was always tense, strung to a high pitch; he and his vocation became one. . . . Thus we understand how Jeremiah came to be what he was, the greatest of the prophets. . . . There were other prophets who knew the secret of a lofty and splendid eloquence to which Jeremiah was altogether a stranger. There were other poets whose reach and execution were far beyond anything that Jeremiah could attain. And yet there is no one in the Old Testament who speaks to our imagination and our sympathy as this lonely and tragic figure. . . . It is the man himself who most appeals to us. We hear him crying to God to let the cup pass from him, and yet we see him forced to drain it to the dregs. We can tell one by one the bitter ingredients mingled in his draught: the dark sin of his people that had grown inveterate, the light-hearted folly with which it went dancing on the road to its inevitable destruction, the scorn and hatred heaped on him for treason to the country he loved beyond his life, the irritation at his rebukes, the incredulity of his warnings. We watch him as he staggers and totters under the weight of the cross to which God had doomed him, a life-long agony for the sin and sorrow of his people, for God's pain and his own. It is God alone who can relieve him. But it was God who appointed his task and would not relent. And thus in his book we find a new thing. Unlike other prophets, he has written down for us his emotions, his heart-broken appeals to God. Thus he became the prophet of personal religion because he had learnt the deepest meaning of religion in his own personal fellowship with God.

It is thus in the inward and spiritual conception of religion that Jeremiah, more nearly than any other Old Testament prophet, anticipates the central truths of Christianity. These ideas were wrought out of his own experience of God,[3] the richest experience of personal religion known before Christ. And these ideas, when passed in review, reveal how near they brought him to that perfect Revelation of the Heart of God which came with Jesus Christ.

In common with all other prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah assumed the existence of the God of Israel, known of His people, who had made a Covenant with them, who had proved His faithfulness to them in spite of their long-continued forgetfulness of Him.

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[3] "Jeremiah was not primarily a theologian. The material with which he deals is not abstract ideas, but religious experience, first and foremost his own." J. R. Gilles, *Jeremiah,* p. 14.

In two important respects, however, Jeremiah advances beyond the other pre-Exilic prophets in his conception of God. In Jeremiah, from first to last, the existence of all other gods is explicitly denied. For him idolatry was not only irreligious, it was irrational. The progress of Hebrew prophecy toward a pure monotheism was a gradual one. At first, it took the position that while the existence of other gods could not be denied, it could be affirmed that Jehovah and He alone is the true God; that other gods are impotent to save their people, but that Jehovah is able and willing to deliver His people if only they will be true to Him. This was essentially the argument of Elijah in the high debate at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). The ethical prophets of the eighth century, Amos, Hosea, Micah, advanced beyond this earlier point of view. The more prophecy came to conceive of God in moral terms, the more universal became their conceptions of God. If God is justice, righteousness, love, then there can be but one God, since justice, righteousness, love are one. In all of this, the earlier prophets were pioneers. We have the fundamental ideas expressed which in time were bound to demolish the existence of all other gods. But these ideas were not carried as yet to their logical conclusions. The beginnings were there. Thus Isaiah (37:19) puts into the mouth of Hezekiah, as he prayed, the words: "The kings of Assyria . . . have cast their gods into the fire, for they were no gods." Such expressions, however, are rare in prophecy before Jeremiah. With him, however, we find the idea an explicit part of his teaching from beginning to end. In one of his earliest oracles (2:11) he reproaches his people for their faithlessness. Other nations will not abandon their gods, although they be no gods. But Israel has forsaken Jehovah. In another early prophecy at Anatoth (5:7) the same idea is repeated, and in a still later prophecy (16:20), it is developed into a final dogma. In all of this Jeremiah completed the work of the earlier prophets and anticipated the final monotheism of the prophets of the Exile.

In another respect Jeremiah advances in his conception of God beyond the earlier prophets. Their belief in God was founded upon the unquestioned tradition, history, teachings of the past. This was all a part, too, of the spiritual inheritance of Jeremiah. But in addition he had had his own powerful and exquisite experience of God, so convincing that Jeremiah could no more doubt the Being of God than he could doubt the reality of existence itself. God was to him a fact of immediate and indubitable experience. It was, as we have seen, his loneliness which forced him more and more upon God. He had only God to fall back upon. His own sensitiveness, the delicacy of his feeling, which caused his soul to recoil alike from the blatant sin and moral perverseness of the people, and from the message of retribution which had been put into his mouth to deliver, threw him, so to speak, into the very arms of God for shelter and for comfort. There he sobbed out his grief and moaned his sorrow. There he talked with God with broken voice and begged to be released from a task which became increasingly repugnant to him. He talked with God with a familiarity which even seems to border upon irreverence, and his prayers become the most intimate outpourings of a heart in closest fellowship with God. It is at this point that the religion of Jeremiah differentiates itself from that of the prophets which had preceded him. There is little of the transcendence of God to be found in Jeremiah. We do not hear so much about His majesty, His awfulness, His glory.[4] Instead, God is a present Friend. Jeremiah talks with Him as one would talk to his friend. He even expostulates with Him. He asks, "Why?" At times he displays even a fierce resentment at the ways of God. In a word, God is an immediate, personal, spiritual Presence, with whom Jeremiah enters into full and intimate communion. In all of this, Jeremiah anticipates the teaching and example of Jesus beyond any other Old Testament prophet.

In this way religion, for Jeremiah, became an affair of the individual heart in its relation with God. Thus far through the whole history of Old Testament prophecy, it had been a question only of the relation between God and the nation in its corporate capacity. It is the salvation of the nation only that the older prophets have in view. They treat the people as a unit. Sin for them is national sin. Redemption is national deliverance. The individual has his importance only as a member of that community whose destinies engaged the attention of the prophets. But with Jeremiah, this had ceased to be true; at least it had ceased to be the only truth in religion. His own experience had shown him the meaning of a personal religion. And what had been between himself and God must be between the human soul as such and God. In addition, he was to live through the actual dissolution of the Hebrew state. He witnessed with his own eyes the destruction of the outward fabric upon which the very existence of Old Testament religion depended as the older prophets had conceived it. True, he never lost faith in the ultimate restoration of Israel. Yet always there remained the indestructible, indissoluble relation between the soul itself and God. Thus this tremendous transition from national to personal religion was wrought out in the experience of Jeremiah who by the travail of his own soul pointed the way to a new and spiritual conception of religion as the relation of the personal soul to God.[5]

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[4] See George Adam Smith, ibid., p. 352.

Inevitably, with this conception of the relation of the soul to God, there came a more spiritualized conception of sin. Jeremiah, as we have seen, shared in the old ideas of national and social sin. Its most familiar forms were idolatry, vice, and injustice. Jeremiah inveighed against these with all the ardor of the older prophets, with whose writings he was perfectly familiar. We hear echoes of Amos and Micah all through the book of Jeremiah. Neither of these exceeded the sweep of his moral indignation at the irreligion and immorality of the people. And the same conclusion is reached by them all: the covenant between them and God had been abrogated because of their faithlessness, and the inevitable punishment involving the destruction of the people and nation was their just due.

In all of these ideas, Jeremiah repeated the hoarse refrain of the prophets who had preceded him. But the more his eyes were turned inward, the more it became apparent to him that the source of all sin lay in the corruptible nature of the heart itself. Its secret was to be found in the operation of a perverse human will. For the first time in Old Testament religion, sin is traced to its roots.

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[5] The reader will find an interesting attempt to trace the process of this development in the mind of Jeremiah in George Adam Smith, op. cit., pp. 368ff.

> Gifted beyond all others with psychological insight and keenness of introspection [Jeremiah] is not content with a . . . description of the manifestations which sin assumes. With delicate analytical skill he takes them back to their cause, which he finds in the evil heart of man, defiant of God's control, obstinate in taking its own course.[6]

Once more, Jeremiah was put upon the track of this as the result of his own personal experience of God. How fit was he to be the mouthpiece of the message of God? How sure was he that this message would in no respect be perverted as it passed through his own mind and soul? How clean was he? As he lay bare his own soul before God, he was startled at the disclosure of the evil possibilities of his own heart.[7] He felt himself to be deceitful, and he prayed for his own purification. And what was true of him must be true of others. If he who had aspired to know and was ready to do the Will of God, found sin crouching at the door, must it not lie, sleepless, vigilant, venomous, malignant, within the hearts of those who were recreant to God's Will and way? Thus sin, to Jeremiah's clear unfaltering vision becomes disclosed as a spiritual disease, an inward infection from which the heart must be freed before righteousness could become a matter of fact and life. It was this discovery which caused him to ask, in a word more often quoted, perhaps, than any other, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?"[8] Yet Jeremiah never went to the length of believing that this defect was irradicable. He was no believer in total depravity. The ultimate truth about the human heart was not its inclination to evil, but its instinct for God. If the stork in the heavens knows its appointed times, if the turtledove and the swallow observe the coming of the seasons,[9] so the soul by a sure instinct knows that it belongs to God. What is required, however, is that the soul's native desire for God and His righteousness shall become regnant, shall become the soul's dominant passion, shall replace the baser instincts of a heart that is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." In all of this, it is easy to see how far Jeremiah advanced in his conception of the nature of sin beyond his predecessors, and how he approached the teaching of Jesus who pointed to the inner motives and thoughts of the heart as the source of evil. This conception of the nature of sin is not the least of the positive contributions of Jeremiah to religion.

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[6] A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 39. [7] Jeremiah 17:9. [8] Jeremiah 13:23.

If the source of evil lies in the human heart and will, the cure for it can be found only there. The old desire must be replaced by a new desire; the evil will must give way to a good will; the heart itself must be made clean and regenerate. Hence we are led to the culminating idea in the religion of Jeremiah, the New Covenant between God and man. The old Covenant had presupposed man's moral ability to fulfill the requirements of righteousness. It was based on the idea that God's children had the moral capacity to keep the Law. Experience had proved that, although God had been "an husband unto them," they had lacked that ability. The difficulty lay in a corrupted will, an infirm heart, a diseased soul. If, therefore, a fellowship were to continue between God and man, there must be a new promise; God's work must go deeper and the foundations of this fellowship must be laid not on the terms of an outward law, but within the desires of the heart itself. This is the New Covenant of which Jeremiah speaks: "I will put my law

[9] Jeremiah 8:7.

in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, . . . and they shall all know me from the least even to the greatest."[10]

Thus the New Covenant of Jeremiah is, in its essence, the New Testament of the Christian who aspires to attain to the righteousness of God not "after the law of a carnal commandment but after the power of an endless life."[11] Nowhere does the Old Testament more nearly approximate the New than in this inspired teaching of Jeremiah.

Yet it is evident, also, how far short it falls of the full message of the Gospel. Nowhere in Jeremiah is the method described by which this work of inward purification and renewal is to take place. Nowhere are we told how God is thus to touch the inward springs of motive and desire and direct these toward the attainment of holiness. We have the promise, but no more. The hope is held up that this shall be done —but that is all. Across the dark background of man's moral failure, the light is flashed that God has not yet exhausted either the will or the way by which He will bring man into final fellowship with Himself. But centuries must pass before another inspired writer could cry:

> God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.[12]

There is another significant anticipation of the Incarnation to be found in the religion of Jeremiah. He is not content to picture the Wrath of God at the sin of His children. He advances to the idea of the pain of God. This conception also was born out of Jeremiah's own spiritual experience. His own soul had been filled with wrath at the moral perverseness and obtuseness of the people. But how often, also, he had cried out in pain and agony over their failure to respond to his appeals that they turn from their evil ways to find their peace and their salvation in obedience to God. And if this had been the experience of the prophet, must not this pain also have lain in the Heart of God Himself? God, that is, has not only set the sins of men before His face; He carries them also in His heart. He suffers because of them, and it is His suffering for sin that is the ultimate guarantee that that sin shall and must be put away.

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[10] Jeremiah 31:33, 34.

[11] Hebrews 7:16.

[12] Romans 5:8, 21.

Thus the idea of sacrifice for sin, of God's sacrifice of Himself through suffering whereby the sin of man shall be put away, emerges from the suffering heart of Jeremiah and becomes an imperishable part of that religion which Jeremiah bequeathed to the world. Unconsciously also, in his own person, he became the prophecy, the prototype of that Lamb of God who in the fullness of time was to take away the sin of the world. We watch the on-going life of Jeremiah. That life can hardly be described better than by saying that it was a progressive entrance into the moral experience of the people with whose fate he had been chosen to identify himself. He is no mere spokesman standing on the outside, himself not involved in the moral issues which are at stake. He does not exhort the people from a vantage ground of personal safety, and then wring his hands as he sees them swept to a ruin from which he is exempt. Rather, he identifies himself with them, shares their lot, in a very real sense takes their sins upon his own soul, and goes with them to the inevitable punishment which awaits them.

From the year of Carchemish onward he appears to have faced the inevitable and to have made no further effort to rescue the people or to save himself. He stands upright and unafraid in the current of events now flowing swiftly to the final catastrophe. He suffers every humiliation which the people heap upon him, and yet, given the chance to desert them, and to spend his last days in peace and comfort in Babylon, refuses it and chooses rather to share the lot of the wretched remnant that remained in Palestine. He is dragged from there by the panic-stricken horde that rushed down to Egypt after the murder of Gedaliah and there

> on alien soil and among countrymen who had given themselves to an alien religion, the one great personality of his time, who had served the highest interests of his nation for forty years, reluctant but unfaltering, and whose scorned words, every one, had been vindicated by events, is with the dregs of his people swept from our sight. *He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was taken from prison and from judgment and cut off from the land of the living: and they made his grave with the wicked though he had done no violence neither was deceit in his mouth.*[18]

That Jeremiah suffered with the people is plain. That he voluntarily shared the consequences of their guilt, himself guiltless, is also clear. Nowhere, however, can we discover any indication that he felt, or that others felt, that he had suffered *for* them. Neither is it possible to trace any connection between this vicarious suffering of Jeremiah and the ultimate redemption of the people. It is true that Jeremiah's example became a profound influence in the later moral life of his people. It is even possible that the inspired author of Second Isaiah had Jeremiah consciously in mind when he wrote the immortal chapter of the Suffering Servant. That later reverent thought may have felt that in some real sense the sufferings of this self-sacrificing servant of God had been an element in their subsequent redemption is not unlikely. Neither can we altogether escape the conviction that Jeremiah himself may have felt that he was doing an atoning work for the people whom he loved, with the burden of whose sins he was weighed down, and for whom he had been willing to bear the uttermost of grief and suffering.

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[18] George Adam Smith, ibid., p. 344.

Yet the chief value of this identification of Jeremiah with a sin-laden people lies not in what he felt or what later generations may have felt concerning the relation of this to their redemption, but rather in that foreshadowing in his person of the Suffering Savior who in the fullness of time was to bear in His body on the Tree the sins of the world, "and this is his greatest glory."

Jeremiah himself was not primarily a theologian, but he was the father of much theology. Readers of the book which bears his name must have been impressed with the fact that here is the source of nearly every theological development in the later history of the Jewish people. Without Jeremiah, as we have seen, the Psalms could not have been written, which are the confessional of the world. With Jeremiah begins that speculative attitude toward Providence and its inscrutable decrees which opens a whole new chapter in Old Testament literature, of which the books of Habakkuk and Job are the chief examples. All the later prophets drew on Jeremiah. Obadiah found his inspiration there. The work of Ezekiel depends directly on the approach to a spiritual restoration of the people foreseen and foretold by Jeremiah. And the Great Prophet of the Exile sees in Jeremiah and in his capacity for vicarious suffering the type of the Suffering Servant who shall bring redemption to the people. Derided in his lifetime, scorned and neglected, Jeremiah both in what he was and what he said became the source and inspiration of the Hebrew thinkers and prophets who followed him.

It is as interesting as it is pathetic to recall that Jeremiah, the most spiritual of all the prophets, has this in common with all other Old Testament writers, that he has apparently no hope of a personal immortality. One reads Jeremiah in vain for any hint of assurance that he looked forward for himself or for others to a survival of death and the grave. Does it not add to our veneration of this heroic soul, that he labored and toiled for God without thought of self, and found in the doing of God's Will, in the knowledge that he had not proved a faithless servant, his full reward? It is always so with God's own workmen. They never toil for any other reward. They never look for a visible crown beyond the grave. Theirs is the crown of righteousness. But Christ completed the idea of a godlike human life when He taught that such a life can never perish. The Old Testament is of use when it reminds us that the hope of immortality is never in the foreground as the primary object and reason for living the life of God. But the New Testament adds the indispensable word that he that doeth the Will of God abideth forever.

# APPENDICES

## A

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

B.C. 760. Amos
740. Hosea
735-701. Isaiah and Micah
722. Fall of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom
695-639. Reign of Manasseh
638. Accession of Josiah
630-625(?) The Scythian Invasion
621. The "Book of the Laws" discovered
615-613. Fall of Nineveh
608. Battle of Megiddo. Death of Josiah
608. Reign of Jehoahaz (3 months)
607. Accession of Jehoiakim
604. Battle of Carchemish
597. Jehoiakim's Death
Reign of Jehoiachin (3 months)
First Babylonian Captivity
Accession of Zedekiah
588. Siege of Jerusalem begun
586. Fall of Jerusalem
Second Babylonian Captivity
Gedaliah and the Flight into Egypt

## B

### CHRONOLOGY OF JEREMIAH'S LIFE

| *Event* | *Date* | *Kings of Judah* |
|---|---|---|
| Birth | B.C. 650-649 | Manasseh |
| Call | 627-626 | Josiah |
| At Anatoth | 626-621 | Josiah |
| The Great Reform | 621 | Josiah |
| Quiet years at Jerusalem | 626-608 | Josiah |
| Public Ministry at Jerusalem | 608-597 | Jehoiakim |
| Dictation of the Prophet's Roll | 604 | Jehoiakim |
| Before the Exile at Jerusalem | 597-586 | Jehoiachin<br>Zedekiah |
| The Exile and after | 586-... | |

## C

### OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

I. *Reign of Josiah* (639-608 B. C.)

Dates: 650 B. C. Jeremiah's birth
627 B. C. Jeremiah's call
621 B. C. Discovery of Book of Laws
608 B. C. Battle of Megiddo; death of Josiah

(1) Call of Jeremiah. Chapter 1
(2) The Call to Repentance. Chapters 2; 3; 4:1-4
(3) The Scythian Invasion. Chapters 4:5-31; 5:15-18; 6:1-8, 22-30
(4) The Great Reform. Chapters 11:1-8, 18-23; 12:1-6
(5) Quiet Years at Jerusalem. Chapters 16:1-9; 5:1-14, 19-31; 6:9-21; 8:4-8; 14; 15:1-4; 9:2-9

II. *Reign of Jehoiakim* (608-597 B. C.)

Dates: 608 B. C. Three months' reign of Jehoahaz
607 B. C. Fall of Nineveh
605 B. C. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon
604 B. C. Defeat of Egypt by Babylonians at Carchemish
604 B. C. Baruch writes Jeremiah's prophecies
598 B. C. Jehoiakim's rebellion
597 B. C. Death of Jehoiakim

(1) The Battle of Megiddo. Chapters 8:14-22; 9:1
(2) Lament on the death of Jehoahaz. Chapter 22:10-12
(3) Prophecy against Jehoiakim. Chapter 22:1-9, 13-19
(4) Parable of the Waist-cloth. Chapter 13:1-17
(5) Parable of the Potter. Chapters 18; 19; 20:1-6
(6) Conditions in Jerusalem. Chapters 11:9-17
(7) The Great Temple Sermon. Chapters 11:15-16; 7:3-34; 26
(8) The Nature of Sin. Chapters 8:1-3, 9-13; 17:1-4
(9) The Consequences of Evil. Chapters 9:10-26; 10:17-25; 21:13-14; 13:15-17
(10) The Battle of Carchemish. Chapter 46
(11) The Approaching Doom of Jerusalem. Chapter 25

(12) Against the Nations. Chapters 47, 48, 49
(13) The Wages of Sin. Chapter 13:20-27
(14) The Call of Baruch. Chapter 45 604 B.C.
(15) The Writing of the Roll. Chapter 36
(16) Plundered by her Neighbors. Chapter 12:7-17
(17) The Rechabites. Chapter 35
(18) Jerusalem Helpless. Chapter 22:20-23
(19) A Curse on False Patriots. Chapter 17:5-8

III. *Reign of Zedekiah* (597-586 B. C.)

Dates: 597 B. C. First captivity of princes and nobles of people
597 B. C. Accession of Zedekiah
588 B. C. Revolt of Zedekiah
586 B. C. Destruction of Jerusalem and second captivity

(1) Dirge on Jehoiachin and the Queen Mother. Chapters 13:18-19; 22:24-30
(2) The Faithless Shepherds. Chapter 23:1-8
(3) The Baskets of Figs. Chapter 24
(4) Approaching Doom. Chapter 16:10-21
(5) Letter to the Exiles. Chapter 29
(6) The People Must Submit to the Yoke of Babylon. Chapters 27, 28
(7) Against False Prophets. Chapter 23:9-40
(8) The Doom of Babylon. Chapter 51:59-64
(9) The New Covenant. Chapter 31:31-34
(10) The Capture of Jerusalem foretold. Chapter 21:1-10
(11) Resistance to Babylon is futile. Chapter 34
(12) The Destruction of Jerusalem is certain. Chapter 37
(13) The Purchase of Property in Anatoth. Chapter 32:6-15, 24-26, 36-44
(14) The Sin of the Heart. Chapter 17:9-17
(15) The Trouble of Jeremiah. Chapter 20:7-18
(16) Promises of Restoration. Chapter 33:1-9
(17) Jeremiah in the Dungeon. Chapter 38
(18) A promise to Ebed-melech. Chapter 39:15-18
(19) The Capture of Jerusalem. Chapter 39:1-14
(20) Laments over Jerusalem. Chapters 15:5-12; 30:12-15

IV. *The Exile and After.* (586 B. C.—)

- (1) The Fate of Jeremiah. Chapters 39:3, 14; 40:1-6
- (2) The Remnant under Gedaliah. Chapter 40:7-16
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